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ENGLISH

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PASKO A Filipino Christmas

Behind the Voice Jose Mari Chan

President Marcos

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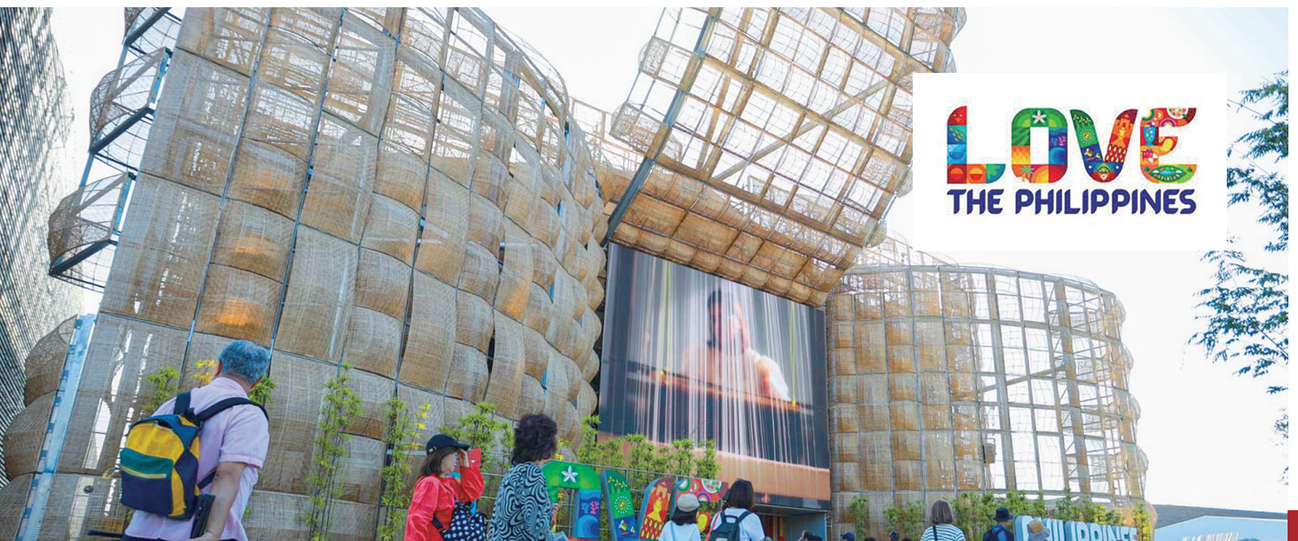
Transformation to a "Tourism Powerhouse":

Philippine Challenge and Prospects as envisioned by Secretary Frasco

Unraveling the Future Strategy and Business Opportunities of an Evolving Hospitality Nation from the Osaka Expo Speech

In recent years, the Southeast Asian tourism market has been exposed to fierce competition, but amidst this, the Philippines aims for the ambitious vision of becoming an **"Asian Tourism Stronghold".** Under the Marcos administration, Tourism Secretary Christina Frasco is promoting multi-faceted strategies and reforms to achieve this. Tourism is not merely a leisure industry but a pillar of national development. We will delve into its current state and the Philippines' strategy to enhance its presence on the international stage while deepening its ties with Japan.



01

Secretary Frasco's Policy and Vision:

Breaking Away from Stagnation

Since taking office in June 2022, Tourism Secretary Christina Frasco has championed a clear vision to **"make the Philippines an Asian tourism powerhouse"** and has strongly supported President Marcos's initiative for tourism industry recovery. Her mission is to revitalize the tourism industry, which was hit hard by the COVID-19 pandemic, and to create employment and stimulate local economies through tourism. A characteristic of Secretary Frasco's policy is an inclusive development approach of **"No place left behind"**. This strategy focuses on potential tourist destinations in the provinces, in addition to well-known ones, strengthening tourism infrastructure development and promotion, and spreading the benefits of tourism nationwide. Furthermore, the **"Love the Philippines"** campaign, which highlights the Philippines' history, culture, natural beauty, and spirit of hospitality, is gaining attention both domestically and internationally. Secretary Frasco also emphasizes improving the quality and sustainability of tourism. She aims to promote "high-value tourism" that not only increases the number of tourists but also raises per capita spending and length of stay, accompanied by job creation and investment. Specifically, she launched the **"Philippine Experience Program (PEP)"**, a luxury tour that offers deep cultural, artistic, and culinary experiences, as a flagship project, and is also focusing on attracting cruise tourism and international conferences (MICE). She also shows a proactive stance in developing new markets such as medical tourism, gastronomy, and tourism targeting the Islamic cultural sphere.

She also emphasizes public-private partnerships and cooperation with other ministries, promoting the development of high-end tourism markets and the improvement of reception environments through strategic partnerships. Efforts are also being made in tourism digitalization, such as airport and port expansion and improvement in collaboration with the Department of Transportation, and the development of smartphone applications using digital technology, and strengthening online information dissemination.
Secretary Frasco positions the tourism industry not as mere entertainment, but "**as a strategic industry that leads to job creation, regional revitalization, and an improved national image".** She aims for the Philippines to become one of Asia's leading tourism nations as a pillar of **"creating a new Philippines (Bagong Pilipinas)".**

02

Key Measures of the National Tourism Development Plan (NTDP):

A Roadmap for Growth

The National Tourism Development Plan (NTDP), spanning from 2023 to 2028, was formulated to materialize Secretary Frasco's vision and serve as the Marcos administration's blueprint for the tourism industry. This plan sets forth seven strategic goals for sustainable development and strengthening international competitiveness. The main measures are as follows:

Improvement of Tourism Infrastructure and Access:

In addition to developing airports, seaports, and roads, efforts will be made to improve access by expanding air routes and easing visa regulations. The Tourism Road Infrastructure Program (TRIP) will expand the transportation network connecting local areas and major cities, and the expansion of local airports and the establishment of new international routes (e.g., Manila-Sapporo direct flights) are also underway.

Digitalization of the Tourism Sector and Strengthening Connectivity:

Digital technology will enhance convenience, such as the provision of the integrated travel app "Travel Philippines" and the establishment of a 24-hour call center. This will help reduce stress related to local travel and information gathering for business travelers and expatriates.

Enhancement of Tourism Experience Quality:

Focus will be placed on providing safe, secure, and high-quality experiences to attract repeat visitors. **"Tourist Rest Areas (TRAs)"** are being set up in tourist destinations nationwide, equipped with clean toilets, charging facilities, and nursing rooms, to improve traveler comfort.

Balanced Development and Promotion of Tourism Products:

Diverse tourism resources across the country will be discovered, and region-specific tourism products will be developed and branded. Secretary Frasco advocates for "**repainting the tourism map**", aiming to spread tourism income across the country by shining a light on lesser-known destinations.

Diversification of the Tourism Sector:

In addition to beach resorts, various sectors such as ecotourism, gastronomic tourism, medical and wellness tourism, cultural and heritage tourism, and sports and MICE tourism will be nurtured. The Philippines has received international acclaim, such as being selected as **"the world's best dive spot"**, and is developing strategies that leverage its strengths.

Maximization of Domestic and International Tourism:

Both the promotion of domestic travel and the attraction of international visitors will be pursued. Through the Tourism Promotions Board (TPB), the Philippines is strengthening participation in major international travel fairs and collaboration with local travel agencies, achieving successful business negotiations.

Strengthening Tourism Governance:

Collaboration between the central government, local governments, the private sector, and local communities will be strengthened. Secretary Frasco herself actively visits various regions to reflect local needs in the NTDP, aiming for steady implementation of policies.

The NTDP is a mid-term strategy that positions the tourism industry as a driving force for national development and promotes multi-faceted reforms, from infrastructure to human resources and marketing.

03

2024 Tourist Numbers and Market Trends:

The Reality of Missing Targets

The Philippine tourism industry, though on a rapid recovery path since the reopening of borders in 2022, began to show signs of slowing down in 2024. In 2023, the Philippines welcomed 5.45 million international tourists, exceeding the initial target of 4.8 million, and tourism revenue more than doubled from the previous year, reaching 482.15 billion pesos. The main markets were Korea, the United States, and Japan. However, although the Department of Tourism set a high target of 7.7 million visitors for 2024, the actual number of visitors was approximately 5.64 million to 5.9 million, falling significantly short of the target. As a result, the Philippines' tourist arrivals among the 10 ASEAN countries ranked 7th, lagging behind Malaysia, Thailand, Vietnam, and Cambodia. Several factors are pointed out as reasons for the decline in visitor numbers:

Underperformance of Key Markets:

The return of Chinese tourists, who were the second largest market before the pandemic, has been slow, reaching only 264,000 in 2023. Delays in electronic visa introduction, geopolitical tensions due to the South China Sea issue, and an economic slowdown in China are believed to have contributed. South Korea, the largest market, also showed a declining trend in the first half of 2024.

Access and Infrastructure Challenges:

Congestion and aging of the main international airport (NAIA) in Metro Manila, and the inconvenience of secondary transportation from local airports to tourist destinations have long been pointed out. The difficulty of access unique to an island nation makes planning multi-destination tours challenging.

Tourism Cost and Marketing:

The Philippines, once popular for its "affordable prices," has seen its cost competitiveness relatively decrease due to rising prices accompanying economic growth and a trend of peso appreciation (and yen depreciation against the peso). Furthermore, compared to other countries, the tourism budget is smaller, and promotional activities have lagged, which is also a challenge.

Safety Image:

Terrorist incidents in some areas and crime reports in the capital region have created an impression of being "somewhat dangerous," particularly affecting the European, American, and Japanese markets. While the government is strengthening security measures, dispelling this image remains a challenge.

Secretary Frasco herself frankly admits that **"the Philippines has not yet become a preferred destination in ASEAN".** To overcome these challenges, multi-faceted measures are being explored.

PHILIPPINE TOPICS Hon. Christina Garcia Frasco, Secretary of Tourism

04

Challenges and Hopes for Recovery in the Japanese Market:

Beyond the Yen Depreciation

For the Philippines, Japan has traditionally been one of the important tourism markets, but in recent years, its presence has relatively declined. Before the pandemic, in 2019, approximately 682,000 Japanese (about 8% of all foreign visitors) visited the Philippines, making it the 4th largest source country. However, in 2023, this number was only about 305,000, less than half. Several factors contribute to the decrease in Japanese tourists:

Economic Factors

The biggest factor is the rapid depreciation of the yen in recent years and the rise in prices within the Philippines. Once popular as an "affordable and easy tropical travel destination," its relative cost performance appeal has diminished. This is also an unavoidable factor for expatriates and business people considering local living expenses.

Air Access

While direct flights between Japan and the Philippines, which were suspended during the pandemic, are recovering, the air network is still limited compared to popular destinations like Hawaii and Europe for Japanese travelers. Access is particularly difficult for residents of provincial areas, and rising fuel costs have also pushed up airfare.

Lack of Promotion Strategy

Measures to raise awareness of Philippine tourism in the Japanese market have not been sufficient until now. However, in recent years, there have been signs of improvement, such as the strengthening of the Tokyo Representative Office and Secretary Frasco herself participating in Tourism EXPO Japan. The "Love the Philippines" campaign receiving an award in Japan can be seen as part of these efforts.

Safety and Travel Destination Image

Japanese tourists, especially seniors, prioritize safety and comfort at their travel destinations. There is still a preconceived notion among some about safety and hygiene concerns in the Philippines, which affects their choice of travel destination. However, improvements are being reported, such as the lowering of travel advisories for parts of the Mindanao region.

Secretary Frasco points out that Japanese travelers **"tend to prefer the Philippines because it is safe, English is widely spoken by Filipinos, and prices are relatively low, making it possible to attract repeat visitors".** The persistent demand for longer stays among Japanese, such as for language studies in Cebu and retirees, suggests that if challenges are adequately addressed, the Japanese market could once again become a promising target.

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05

The Future of Japan-Philippines Relations as shown in the Osaka Expo Speech:

Weaving

Bonds At the 2025 Osaka-Kansai Expo, the Philippines celebrated June 7th as its official National Day, and Tourism Secretary Frasco delivered a speech there. This speech provided an important opportunity to delve deeply into Philippine tourism, culture, and its relationship with Japan. In her speech, Secretary Frasco emphasized deep gratitude to Japan and the strong relationship between the two countries.

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First, Secretary Frasco quoted President Marcos's words, strongly asserting the importance of the partnership with Japan. **"President Marcos described Japan as a sure and reliable partner. And in a world swirling with division and uncertainty, such friendship is not merely precious, but indispensable."** By emphasizing that the unwavering friendship with Japan is not merely valuable but indispensable in a modern world filled with division and doubt, she reaffirmed Japan's position as a strategic partner. This likely demonstrates the essence of the deep bond between the two countries in terms of economic cooperation and security.

Furthermore, she stated that the Philippines' intention for participating in the Expo goes beyond mere "exhibition". **"We are not here merely to showcase the Philippines. We are here to extend our hand, open our hearts, and speak our authentic self to the world. This is not for exhibition, but for dialogue. Not as a showcase, but as an invitation to the world."** This indicates the Philippines' stance to utilize the Philippine Pavilion not just as an exhibit, but as a place to express itself through dialogue with the world and actively deepen exchanges. Secretary Frasco introduced her speech by calling it "not just a celebration, but a call to rediscover the Philippines," emphasizing that the Filipino people themselves are the nation's treasure and the driving force of tourism. The pavilion's theme, **"Nature, Culture & Community — Woven Together for a Better Future"**, demonstrates the philosophy that human connections should be at the center of progress even in a highly digitized society. This National Day event served as an excellent platform for cultural diplomacy and tourism promotion for the Philippines. Through parades and stage performances like **"Hinabing Hiraya (Woven Dreams)"**, traditional cultures from the Luzon, Visayas, and Mindanao regions were showcased, demonstrating the Philippines' national motto of **"unity in diversity"** to the world. Secretary Frasco also met with major Japanese travel agencies and airline representatives, raising expectations for specific increases in visitor numbers and the creation of new tours after the Expo.

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PHILIPPINE TOPICS Hon. Christina Garcia Frasco, Secretary of Tourism

ポテンシャルを解き放つ「織りなす」国家

フラスコ観光大臣のリーダーシップの下、フィリピン観光業は大きな変革期を迎えている。そのビジョンは明確であり、国家観光開発計画（NTDP）という具体的なロードマップも存在する。フラスコ大臣が大阪万博のスピーチで示したように、フィリピンは日本を「揺るぎない、信頼できるパートナー」と捉え、感謝の念とともに、観光分野での深い対話と招待を世界に向けて発信している。日本のイノベーションに触発され、次世代を見据えた新たな観光イニシアチブを立ち上げたことは、両国間の絆が単なる経済関係に留まらない、より深い文化的・精神的な連携へと発展している証左だろう。

確かに、インフラの未整備、安全性への懸念、環境保護、人材育成、そして制度面の課題など、乗り越えるべきハードルは少なくない。2024年の観光客数目標未達という現実も、フィリピンが「アジアで優先的に選ばれる目的地」になるための道のりが険しいことを示唆している。日本人観光客の減少傾向も、円安やコスト増という経済的要因に加え、プロモーション戦略や受け入れ環境の改善が引き続き求められることを浮き彫りにする。

しかし、フィリピンには「人と自然」という圧倒的な観光資源があり、ホスピタリティ精神に溢れる国民性が最大の強みだ。フラスコ大臣が繰り返し語る「織りなす（woven）」という言葉は、多島国家であるフィリピンの多様な文化、人々の連帯、そしてより良い未来を紡ぎ出す決意を象徴している。観光業を「国民統合と経済成長の原動力」と位置付け、ハード・ソフト両面での改革を推進する姿勢は、フィリピンが過去の課題を直視し、持続可能な成長を目指す覚悟を示していると言えるだろう。

旅したくなる国から、何度も訪れたくなる国へ」という転換を遂げるため、フィリピンは今、まさにその途上にある。

ビザ制度の改革、戦略的な市場多様化、高付加価値な体験の提供、インフラ整備の継続、そして質の高い人材育成とサービス改善は、国際競争力を高める上で不可欠な要素だ。これらの課題を着実にクリアしていくことで、フィリピンはアジアの観光強国としての地位を確立し、世界中の旅行者に愛される真の観光大国となる日も、決して遠くないだろう。

日本企業にとっても、観光関連インフラ投資、ホテル開発、MICEビジネス、ITソリューション提供など、多くのビジネスチャンスが秘められている市場である。この変革の波に乗り、フィリピンというダイナミックな国と共に未来を「織りなす」ことが、新たな成長の鍵となるかもしれない。

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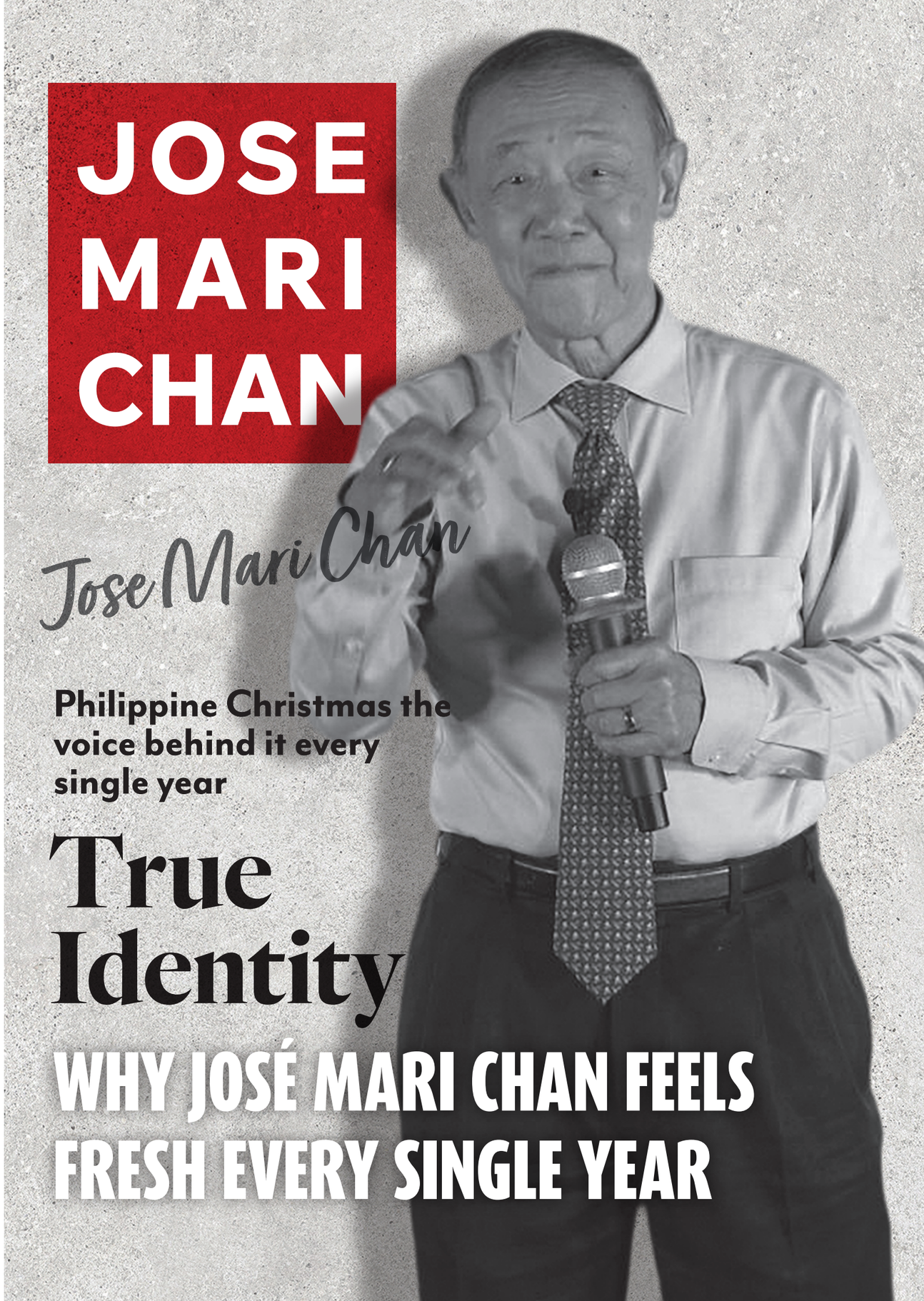

Jose Mari Chan

Philippine Christmas the voice behind it every single year

True Identity

WHY JOSÉ MARI CHAN FEELS FRESH EVERY SINGLE YEAR

September 1. In the Philippines, the same melody pops up from a jeepney's speaker on the morning commute, from a mall's opening BGM, from someone's casual whistling in the office. It's José Mari Chan's "Christmas in Our Hearts." The arrival of the "BER months" (September–December) isn't announced by the weather report or a calendar of events — it's announced by this song. Every year on social media, images of Chan "peeking" out from the edges of a calendar start to circulate. Laughter and shared recognition flip the season's switch. That's how the Filipino year-end begins. He's known for the line, "Music is my hobby. My real job is sugar." Inheriting the family's sugar business, he has run vast plantations and mills as an entrepreneur, training himself to think on a long time horizon.

Weather, markets, capital expenditure, people development — having the nerve to keep making decisions in a volatile primary industry shows up in his music, too. He surveys supply (exposure), demand (seasonal anticipation), and distribution (malls, broadcast, streaming, community), keeping them in balance — neither too much nor too little. As a result, his songs continue to serve as a oorway for new listeners every year

Dwhile meeting three conditions: "you can keep them playing without getting tired," "you can sing them with your family," and "they can be shared across faiths." His leap onto the international stage began in Japan. An early accolade on the Budokan stage impressed upon him the feel of the universal — music that crosses language and cultural borders. The ties to Japan never faded.

Today, for the Filipino community in Japan, his songs are a cue to gather as family — congregational singing in chapels, home-party BGM, collective viewing on YouTube. Wherever you are, this song doesn't bring silence. Someone hums, somebody else harmonizes, and laughter joins in. A song is the smallest unit of social infrastructure. What makes "Christmas in Our Hearts" special isn't lavish arrangement or dense poetry.
The melody is gentle enough to catch by humming, and the lyrical core is gratitude, family, and sharing. Stripped of seasonal marketing fluff, the song keeps its meaning intact across
Even while standing at the front line of business, he reveals small habits that protect the rhythm of creation.

Even while standing at the front line of business, he reveals small habits that protect the rhythm of creation. Third, he designs seasonal music.

A memorable start date — September 1; a pipeline that braids together malls, broadcast, and streaming; synchronization with community events — each is simple, but under long-term operation, they are surprisingly logical. The interview's climax is a short passage about "the essence of Christmas." Just as there's sparkle, there should be quiet gratitude and everyday acts of sharing — words delivered without hesitation. He refuses to turn charity into fireworks, scaling generosity to what can be done as an extension of daily life. That stance keeps the song from ending as a "nice story" and turns it into a prompt to act.

Another of his strengths is how he embraces humor. Every September, the "peeking" memes This feature pairs with an exclusive video interview that steps right into that territory — the moment of birth and the reasons he keeps polishing in Chan's own words. A few viewing cues follow.

Religions and generations. He also never neglects practical nudges that align with annual listening habits — A welcoming covers and collaborations, leaving space in the rrangement so choirs and street musicians can make it their own.

That "courage to let go" expands the circle of re-creation. But to dismiss the phenomenon as mere nostalgia is to miss the point. Even now, in his eighties, Chan resists leaning on past glory, managing to feel freshly "updated" every single year — a rarity. How is that possible? The key is his dual fluency: he can talk about music and business at the same table.

First, he chooses language that "leaves no one behind." While keeping the spiritual core, he carefully picks words that imagine those who are hard to reach. Second, he balances home and work. proliferate, along with jokes about Christmas arriving too early. He plays along. Laughter isn't frivolity — it's an open door anyone can walk through. When we sing while laughing, a song shifts from personal memory to public landscape. This gentleness that even loops memes into the promotion cycle may be one condition for long-lived content. For Chan the entrepreneur, music is also a metaphor for enterprise. If managing a plantation is "work measured in years," then songmaking is "designing a system that will be replayed for decades." Both require ongoing care, not flashy secrets. He trims ornamental notes from the melody, pares down lyrical excess, and keeps his voice in shape — repeating it all for decades, and always with a smile.

So much for the backdrop. How does he, the man himself, look at that song — and how does he handle it?

Music is not only for comfort. It's there to give someone a gentle push. You glimpse that philosophy behind his smile. His advice to younger generations is rich. In an age when algorithms make, erase, and make trends again, Chan demonstrates "a way to compete without rushing." He shows up a little early on the same date every year, offers a song in a key everyone can hum, then leaves room and steps back. Not a grand publicity blast, but a steady accrual of "see you next year."

That accumulation builds a "national season." Here, let's drop in three small scenes observed in the wild:

Scene 1. A supermarket in Makati.

In the checkout line, a clerk is tracing the chorus under their breath. The customer ahead notices and harmonizes; a child behind sways a shoulder. No one's embarrassed, no one conducts. The song wraps the air softly, and for a few dozen seconds strangers share the same small act.

PHILIPPINE TOPICS Jose Mari Chan

Scene 2. A father working overseas posts a link in the family group chat on the first day of September:

"It's started again this year." Stickers dance in unison; a weekend video call gets scheduled.

A song is a practical tool that shrinks distance.

Scene 3. A barangay event is running late; the emcee's cues are coming apart. Someone plays that intro. The crowd falls into a natural chorus, and time reconnects. A song is also the "strongest bridge" across gaps in the program. You can even say Chan runs "two economies." One is the real economy of sugar and real estate. The other is the emotional economy of song. The first generates jobs and investment; the second generates memories and action. Both have supply and demand, inventory and freshness. He manages each without cheating. That's why the work doesn't age — and the business doesn't devolve into selfrighteousness. What makes the video interview compelling is not a string of success stories but concrete process. For example, when revising lyrics, the first check is whether difficult words leave the mouth at the same speed as "home" or "prayer." He avoids writing overly high notes because he imagines the scene of everyone singing together. Prioritizing "singability together" over studio perfection is a perspective rooted in the Philippines' choral culture — and, at the same time, a choice that works anywhere. There's plenty here for companies and local governments wrestling with seasonal marketing. Event success hinges less on a flashy one-off than on designing the skeleton of an annual ritual. A clear entrance cue (September 1), a format open to anyone (a singable key), and a local Feel (community choir moments) — get those three right and content begins to "self-drive." The question is not how much ad budget you spend, but how much space you leave for participation.

Finally, three applications for you:

1.Speak of big themes in simple words.

2.Fix one go-to song (or phrase) as a "seasonal cue." 3.Be generous with memes and fan creativity. Humor is a passport to participation.

Each item is simple; keeping at them is hard. So design the habits that let you keep going. That, more than anything, is José Mari Chan's best lesson.

One editor's note: what lingered from the interview was the pause before he answered. A few seconds to choose words — never rushed. I suspect in that pause he's picturing the faces of family, friends, and listeners. It's not that the song is gentle; it's that the maker is gentle. The order matters — and it sets the work's temperature.

For readers in Japan, this story isn't far away. A stage in Japan nudged him toward international sensibilities; to this day, many Filipinos in Japan connect with family through this song. We hope the video helps bridge those worlds. Scan the QR code and lean into his warm voice.

Magazine linked video

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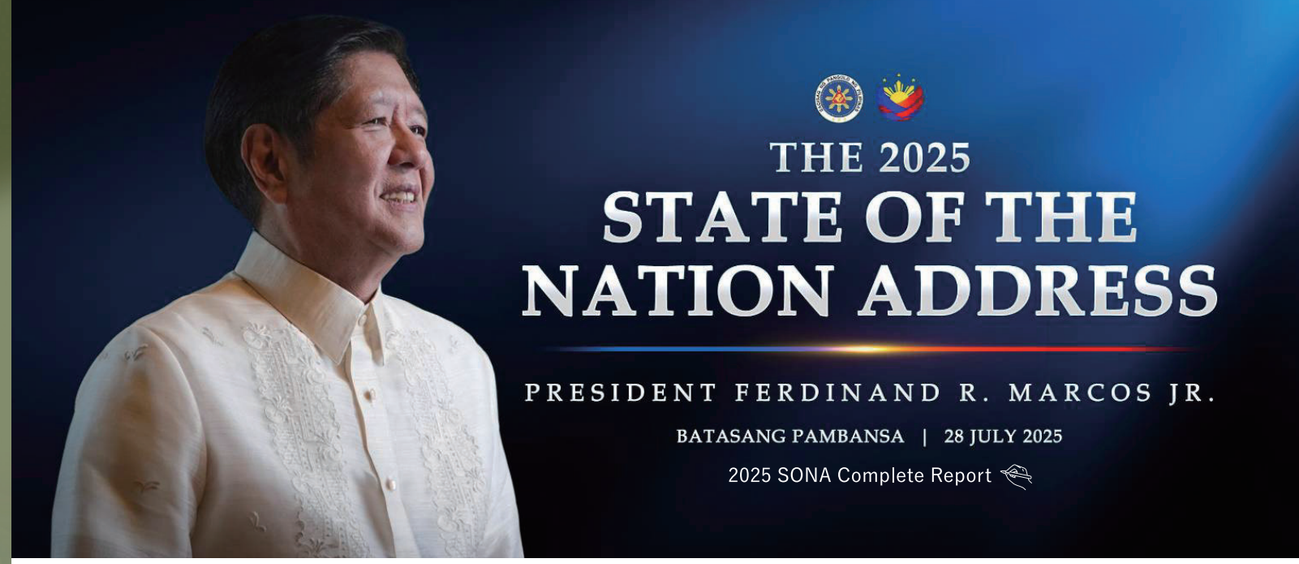
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PRESIDENT FERDINAND R. MARCOS JR.
BATASANG PAMBANSA | 28 JULY 2025
2025 SONA Complete Report

The Question of "Filipino Patriotism"

President Marcos Jr.'s Unconventional SONA: Have Some Shame!

On July 28, 2025, President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr. delivered his fourth State of the Nation Address (SONA) before the Philippine Congress.

While many local media outlets dismissed it as "dull" or "lacking in substance," my assessment—having followed all three previous SONAs—is that it was unconventional, yet profoundly significant.

This extraordinary address exposed not only the deep-seated challenges the Philippines continues to face, but also the President's own sense of urgency—his stance of "no retreat, no surrender."

70 Minutes of the People's Language

The Shock of the First All-Tagalog SONA

One striking feature of this year's SONA was that almost the entire **70-minute speech was delivered in Tagalog (Filipino)—a first for President Marcos Jr.**, and a rare move in the long history of presidential addresses.

At the joint congressional session in Quezon City, the audience included not only Filipinos but also numerous foreign diplomats.

Even in an age of real-time translation technology, those who could not understand Tagalog must have found the experience challenging. Yet this choice was deliberate: it was a statement of intent—to speak directly to the Filipino people, in their own tongue, about promises that cannot wait.

By choosing Tagalog, Marcos underscored both the seriousness of his message and his determination to connect without intermediaries.

An Awareness of Division from the Start

The address began with greetings to legislators fresh from the midterm elections. From the outset, the President appealed to the nation:
"Let us set aside our differences and unite for three things."
Those three, he said, were: *our being Filipino, our patriotism, and our sworn duty to the people.*
The call to **"set aside our differences"** was in itself a rare and courageous admission that national division runs deep.
Indeed, the cracks were visible—Vice President Sara Duterte and several Duterte-allied senators had announced their boycott even before the session began. The once-proud **"Uniteam"** banner was clearly fractured, and the President seemed fully aware of it.

"Good Numbers, But They Mean Nothing" —A Stark Self-Warning

Early in his speech, Marcos referred to the May elections:
"The people are disheartened and disappointed in government. We must workharder, and we must move faster."
Such public acknowledgment of shortcomings is almost unheard of.
On paper, the economy looks promising—business confidence is high, inflation is easing, and employment is rising. Yet the President declared bluntly:
"No matter how beautiful the numbers are, if our people continue to suffer in their daily lives, those figures are nothing but decoration."
Here was a clear expression of concern: growth was not reaching ordinary Filipinos.
Facing declining approval ratings and electoral setbacks, Marcos delivered this SONA as if it were his last chance. **"If this speech has no meaning,"** he seemed to say, **"then there is truly no tomorrow."**

PHILIPPINE TOPICS SONA2025 Report de

Concrete Measures on Everyday Issues

Against this backdrop, most of the address focused on policies that touch daily life. **"The most effective way to fight poverty and hunger,"** he stressed, **"is through decent livelihood."** Employment creation remains the top priority, with DOLE, DTI, DSWD, and DOT working together to provide jobs for the remaining 4% of the unemployed population. Micro-entrepreneurs will continue to receive collateral-free, low-interest loans to help 2.5 million poor households start their own businesses. He highlighted industrial promotion in sectors such as automotive, molding, electronics, biotechnology, pharmaceuticals, critical minerals, Philippine textiles, halal products, construction, and energy. Agriculture received the greatest emphasis. Addressing the international business community, Marcos proclaimed: **"The Philippines is ready. Invest in the diligence and skill of the Filipino people."** He reaffirmed his campaign pledge to bring rice prices down to ₱20 per kilo, citing pilot successes in Luzon, Visayas, and Mindanao. ₱113 billion has been allocated to the Department of Agriculture to expand nationwide supply through KADIWA stores. Those manipulating prices or hoarding goods were warned that

such acts would be treated as *economic sabotage.*
Support measures included ASF vaccines, crop and rice production, roads, irrigation, and facilities benefiting 8.5 million farmers and fisherfolk. He also urged Congress to amend the Coconut Farmers and Industry Trust Fund Act to strengthen the coconut sector.

On energy, Marcos acknowledged three urgent problems—un-electrified homes, frequent power outages, and high costs.
Since his inauguration, 2.5 million households have been newly connected to electricity. In the next three years, about 200 new power plants will provide power to 4 million more. He directed the DOE and NEA to achieve full electrification by 2028, with 1 million households to receive solar home systems.

In water supply, he lambasted poor service affecting over six million users, vowing to hold negligent providers accountable.

In education, he pointed to weak math and reading proficiency, high dropout rates, and child labor.
He outlined the ARAL learning program, expanded early childhood education, more school counselors, new child development centers, and over 22,000 classrooms built in the past three years—with another 40,000 planned.
Teachers will receive laptops, less paperwork, and overtime pay. TVET programs will train high schoolers for immediate employment, while free university education now benefits over two million students, with 260,000 more to be added.

In health, the President promised expanded hospitals, access to doctors in every locality, and wider PhilHealth coverage—now including heart disease, cancer, dialysis, kidney transplants, cataracts, dengue, and rehabilitation for persons with disabilities.
He emphasized *Zero-Balance Billing* in all DOH hospitals, meaning patients owe nothing upon discharge.

Infrastructure remains the backbone of the nation—roads, bridges, railways, airports, ports, irrigation, and housing nationwide.
Discounts for persons with disabilities, seniors, and students on MRT/LRT fares will increase from 20% to 50%, and the "Love Bus" will return as free public transport.
Major projects include the Bataan–Cavite Bridge, PNR Bicol rehabilitation, SLEX extension, and stronger connectivity across Mindanao.

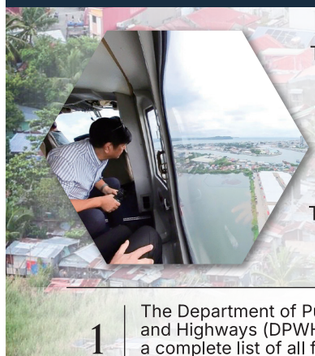
Digitally, internet speed improvement and public Wi-Fi expansion continue—sites have grown from 4,000 in 2022 to 19,000, aiming for nationwide school coverage by year-end.
The eGov app now integrates over 40 government services, with more to come.

On peace and order, he declared the end of insurgency and the absence of guerrilla fronts. Police response time has improved, with 94% of cases addressed within five minutes.
The anti-drug campaign seized ₱83 billion worth of illegal drugs in three years, with 153,000 arrests—including 677 government and police personnel.

In foreign policy, he reaffirmed the principle of "a friend to all, enemy to none," emphasizing this stance as the Philippines chairs ASEAN in 2026.
He also highlighted efforts to protect Overseas Filipino Workers, including securing the release of seafarers held by Houthi rebels.

On disaster preparedness, he urged building modern evacuation centers not dependent on schools, using technologies such as Doppler radar and landslide sensors, and nurturing a culture of *preparedness and bayanihan*—the spirit of mutual help.

Climax of the Speech: **"Have Some Shame!"** – His Outburst Against Corruption –



The President's emotion was most visible in the final moments. Referring to recurring floods despite huge budgets, he erupted:

"To those who commit corruption have some shame!"

Marcos linked past issues bridge collapses, smuggling, rice manipulation, narco-politicians into a single thread, declaring that **"corruption and dishonesty"** were the root causes of slow progress.
The chamber roared with chants of **"BBM! BBM!"** as he announced three anti-corruption directives:

1. The Department of Public Works and Highways (DPWH) must submit a complete list of all flood-control projects from the past three years.
2. Regional oversight committees will review these lists and expose defective or **"ghost"** projects.
3. The results will be made public, and those responsible will be prosecuted.

He further warned that for the 2026 budget, he would veto any General Appropriations Bill (GAB) inconsistent with the National Expenditure Program (NEP)—even if it meant operating under a reenacted budget

"A New Philippines Cannot Be Built by the Old Filipinos"

Here lies the essence of Marcos's message.
Three years into his term, the vision of a *"Bagong Pilipinas"*—a New Philippines—has yet to take root because, he said,

"A new Philippines cannot be built by the same old Filipinos."

Change must begin with the people themselves. Above all, corruption in public service must end.
This SONA began with a call for unity, reached its peak in a denunciation of corruption, and closed with an appeal to the new *Filipino*.

The structure was intentional—and powerful.
There were omissions—no mention of POGOs, customs reforms, or tourism—but Marcos chose to hammer one unforgettable theme: **"Corruption is the root of all evil."**

In that moment, I was reminded of John F. Kennedy's timeless words:

"Ask not what your country can do for you—ask what you can do for your country."

If previous SONAs were annual reports or visions for the future, this one was a challenge—a provocation, a moral call.
Whether this message sparks genuine transformation or fades as a dream will soon be revealed.

For now, what we—Filipinos and foreign friends alike—can do is to wish for a Philippines that grows not only economically but also in political integrity, and to stand beside it as it strives for that change.

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The Power of Forgiveness:

Deciphering Reconciliation in the Philippines 80 Years Post-War

The Caliraya Memorial Service Spotlights the Current State of Japan-Philippines' 'Special Friendship'

August 15, 2025, marked the 80th anniversary of the end of WWII. A solemn memorial service, hosted by the Japan Embassy in the Philippines, was held at the Caliraya Japanese War Dead Memorial Garden in Laguna Province, about a three-hour drive south of Manila. This site, commonly known as the **"Japanese Memorial Garden,"** is a beautiful Japanese garden resting on the shores of Lake Caliraya. This year, approximately **260 participants** gathered on the expansive grounds, including Japanese resident associations, Nikkei organizations, the Japan Association of War-Bereaved Families, and Philippine government officials—people who look to both the past and the future. The monument, erected by the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare in 1973, is designed to resemble an ossuary box made of white granite, commemorating the **518,000 Japanese soldiers who died in the Philippines.** The fact that so many attendees gathered, even 80 years after the war, is significant. It suggests that Japanese working in the region deeply value this day and the history shared by the Philippines and Japan.

The ceremony began with the singing of both national anthems, followed by a moment of silence observed by all attendees. In that silence, we reflected on whether 80 years ago, this day was also a hot day under the intense sun. A message from Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba was read aloud by Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary Kazuya Endo. He strongly appealed that we must never forget that modern peace and prosperity are built upon the precious sacrifices of the war dead and the tireless efforts of people over the past 80 years.

This year's service saw the attendance of high-ranking Philippine government officials. Amidst bilateral cooperation being described as "at an all-time high," including Prime Minister Ishiba's official visit in April, this occasion strongly emphasized the meaning of acknowledging history while stepping into a new era. But how were Japan and the Philippines, once enemies and the latter having suffered immense damage, able to build such a strong friendship? At this 80-year milestone, isn't it crucial to explore the depth of this relationship and reflect upon the past?

Ambassador Kazuya Endo
Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of Japan to the Republic of the Philippines

From Memory to Record:

The Tragedy of the Past and the Miracle of Reconciliation

The figure '80 years post-war,' in historical terms, signifies the phase where "most people who directly experienced it are passing away". This marks a turning point where the memory of the war transitions **"from memory to record".** When we vow "not to forget, not to let it fade," we must ask: What and how should we transmit this to the next generation?

The Scars Left by Over One Million Victims

Immediately after WWII, anger and hatred toward Japan due to the immense damage inflicted by the Imperial Japanese Army (IJA) were extremely strong in the Philippines. It is a fact that the country was even described at one point as having "the worst anti-Japanese sentiment in Asia". The Japanese occupation of the Philippines (1941–1945) brought immeasurable damage and casualties across the archipelago. Starting with the invasion in December 1941, followed by the fall of the Bataan Peninsula and Corregidor in April–May 1942, large-scale casualties occurred during this series of battles. A particularly devastating event was the **"Bataan Death March,"** where approximately 76,000 surrendered American and Filipino prisoners of war were subjected to grueling forced relocation by foot, resulting in an estimated 7,000 to 10,000 deaths. Especially tragic was the Battle of Manila (Manila Street Fighting), which took place from February to March 1945, near the end of the war.

Intense fighting between the IJA garrison and US-Philippine forces resulted in the total destruction of the urban area. In addition to Japanese and US soldiers, an estimated **100,000 Filipino civilians** were caught in the crossfire. This battle reduced Manila, once known as the "Pearl of the Orient," to ruins, claiming countless civilian lives. Across the Philippines, the estimated number of Filipinos who died in the war reached approximately **1.11 million,** constituting the largest number of casualties, representing about 7% of the population at that time. The actions of the Japanese military during the occupation left deep wounds in the hearts of Filipinos. Post-war, 151 Japanese were prosecuted in the Manila Military Tribunal, with 79 sentenced to death, illustrating the intensity of the hatred at the time.

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日本語能力試験 JLPT Japanese-Language Proficiency Test

JFT Basic

Monument Honoring Former President Quirino at Hibiya Park, Tokyo

A President's Conviction Broke the Chain of Hatred

Despite suffering such a catastrophe, why did the Philippines manage to mitigate intense anti-Japanese sentiment after the war and eventually become hailed as a success story of reconciliation in East Asia? The backdrop included the Filipino side's commitment to tolerance and reconciliation, particularly the symbolic event of **the pardon of Japanese war criminals by President Elpidio Quirino** (6th President of the Republic of the Philippines). President Quirino himself carried an unspeakable, tragic past: his wife, three children, and five other relatives were killed by Japanese soldiers during the 1945 Battle of Manila. Nevertheless, he held the strong conviction that **"the chain of hatred must be ended"**.In July 1953, he made the bold political decision to grant clemency to all **105 Japanese Class B and C war criminals** then imprisoned in the Philippines. Astonishingly, this group included 56 death row inmates. Upon granting the pardon, he issued a statement: **"As the one whose wife, three children, and five other relatives were killed by the Japanese, I will be the last one to pardon them. I have taken this measure so that I may not leave to my children and my people a legacy of hatred against the Japanese, who will in the future be our friends and benefactors."** Immediately following the amnesty, he lost the election decisively, as anticipated, and left politics. However, his noble act remains recounted as the cornerstone of Japan-Philippines reconciliation, ensuring no hatred remains for future generations.

Elpidio Rivera Quirino
6th President of the Republic of the Philippines

PHILIPPINE TOPICS Japanese War Dead Memorial Ceremony at Caliraya

The Virtuous Cycle of 'Forgiveness' and 'Apology'

Following President Quirino's pardon, the relationship between Japan and the Philippines shifted from 'hatred' to **'forgiveness,'** developing into a future-oriented partnership. Post-war, Japan provided reparations and economic cooperation to the Philippines, normalizing diplomatic relations by signing the Japan-Philippines Reparations Agreement in 1956. Following the 80th anniversary in 2025, **2026 marks another milestone: the 70th anniversary of normalization.** The Philippine side also extended friendship when President Garcia visited Japan in 1958—the first visit by a Philippine president post-war. He appealed for future friendship, declaring that "Japan and the Philippines are destined to be neighbors and friends". While economic benefits such as enormous ODA (Official Development Assistance) and corporate investments from Japan are cited as a backdrop for this reconciliation, this is not incorrect, but it is also not the whole picture. Sincere efforts at atonement were accumulated over the 80 post-war years, including the collection of remains, memorial services by the Japanese government and private sector, and formal apologies. It is analyzed that this **'apology' from the Japanese side and 'forgiveness' from the Philippine side** created a virtuous cycle, achieving true reconciliation.

'Forgiveness' (**赦し**, *Yurushi* in the context of absolution/pardon) signifies the acceptance of the other party by the injured side regarding a past event, fundamentally differing from 'permission' (Yurushi in the context of granting leave). As a way to overcome an unchangeable past, the decision by the injured party to declare forgiveness at a certain historical point and build a new future relationship is difficult, whether between individuals or nations. Yet, the message delivered by the Philippine President to his people, rooted in the spirit of Christianity and the Bible, carried immense weight. In the Philippines, descriptions of the Japanese occupation in textbooks are relatively concise compared to the over 300 years of Spanish colonization and nearly 50 years of American rule. Although the horrors of the war are not forgotten, an educational or political path that would skew the current national policy toward "anti-Japanism" was not adopted. This reconciliation was interwoven with multiple realistic factors, such as the international situation that required cooperation with Japan to counter communist forces during the Cold War, and the role played by Japan's economic assistance.

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Strategic Partnership:

Economic and Security Cooperation Building the Future

Eighty years after the war, the Japan-Philippines relationship has overcome historical trials. It is now deepening cooperation across a wide range of fields under a **"Strategic Partnership"** bound by strong mutual trust.
This relationship can truly be called a model case of friendly cooperation, learning lessons from the past while looking toward the future.

1 Economic Cooperation: The 'Unwavering Partnership' Supporting Infrastructure Development

Economically, Japan has long been the Philippines' largest aid provider and one of its most important investors. The contribution of ODA (Official Development Assistance) is particularly overwhelming. As of 2024, Japan is the largest ODA provider to the Philippines, offering $13.23 billion in support, which accounts for about one-third of the Philippines' total ODA outstanding balance. This scale far surpasses the second-largest provider, serving as proof of the **"unwavering partnership"** between the two nations. Japan's ODA, provided through yen loans, grant aid, and technical cooperation, plays an indispensable role in the development of the Philippines. Currently, many large-scale infrastructure projects, such as the construction of Metro Manila's first subway (Metro Manila Subway) and the development of the North-South Commuter Railway spanning Luzon Island, are being realized through JICA's yen loans. These projects not only contribute to alleviating severe traffic congestion and improving logistics in the metropolitan area but also contribute to sustainable growth. Furthermore, Japan has been involved as the largest supporter in the long-running Mindanao peace process, providing ODA cooperation for the recovery and development of the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region. The Philippines is a growing ASEAN market with a population exceeding 110 million, and its economy continues to expand steadily. Utilizing its high technology and financial strength, Japan plans to deepen cooperation in areas like railway network expansion, stable energy supply, and decarbonization support to contribute to the sustained development of the Philippine economy and regional stability, in line with the Philippine government's "Build, Better, More (BBM)" infrastructure policy.

2 Security Defense Cooperation Enters a New Phase with RAA Entry into Force

In recent years, security cooperation between Japan and the Philippines has advanced dramatically. Both nations share the philosophy of a "Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy" and have converging interests in maintaining maritime order in the South China Sea.

The landmark event was the Japan-Philippines Reciprocal Access Agreement (RAA), which formally entered into force on September 11, 2025. The RAA is a defense pact that streamlines mutual visits and joint training between the Japan Self-Defense Forces (JSDF) and the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP). This allows both nations to simplify procedures for the temporary deployment and stationing of units and equipment, enabling more agile joint military exercises and Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR) cooperation than before.

In fact, the first joint activity after the RAA entry into force was a combined HADR training exercise conducted by the Philippine Air Force and the Japan Air Self-Defense Force on Cebu Island in October 2025. Both countries position defense cooperation through the RAA as contributing to "regional resilience, peace, and stability". Philippine defense officials frequently refer to Japan as "one of the most trusted partners," underscoring the importance they place on security cooperation with Japan.

The regularization of joint exercises and the deepening of defense equipment and technology cooperation are expected. Utilizing Japan's new defense equipment transfer system established in 2023, the provision of radar technology and coastal surveillance systems to the Philippines is also underway.

3 People-to-People Exchange Youth Connecting the Future

Interpersonal exchange is also a crucial pillar supporting the Japan-Philippines relationship. The Filipino community in Japan is expanding, reaching approximately 330,000 by the end of June 2024. This is the fourth-largest foreign resident population, with many supporting Japan's caregiving, construction, and manufacturing sectors as technical interns or specified skilled workers. Educational exchange is also advancing. As of 2023, about 2,300 Filipino students were enrolled in Japan. Conversely, the number of Japanese studying or doing short-term training in the Philippines reached about 5,800, making it the fifth most frequent destination, following the US and Australia. Driven partly by the Cebu English language study boom, Japanese youth are deepening mutual understanding by studying in the Philippines. Tourism exchange is also vibrant. In 2023, the number of Filipino tourists visiting Japan exceeded 620,000 annually for the first time, setting an all-time record. Factors like increased direct flights to Japan and eased visa requirements, combined with the rise of the Philippine middle class, will likely further boost demand for Japan travel.

PHILIPPINE TOPICS Japanese War Dead Memorial Ceremony at Caliraya

The Gravity of 80 Years and the Pledge for Peace

The shared sentiment among those gathered at the Caliraya Memorial Garden at the 80-year milestone was a pledge for future peace. In his closing remarks, Ambassador Endo referred to the severe contemporary global situation, citing the wars in Russia and Ukraine and the situation in Gaza. He reiterated the importance of deeply engraving the tragedy of war and the preciousness of peace in our hearts, ensuring those memories are passed on without being allowed to fade. The Ambassador concluded by reporting the current friendly cooperative relationship between Japan and the Philippines to the spirits of the war dead, vowing to continue efforts to further solidify the ties between the two nations. On our way back from covering the memorial service, we visited the 17th-century Pagsanjan Church located en route from Caliraya to Manila, recalling a sad chapter of history before its altar. During the 1945 Battle of Manila, incorrect intelligence reached the US military that Japanese troops were entrenched in the church. Consequently, the church was bombed during an air raid and burned down.

Although the Japanese forces had already moved to Manila, the bombing was indiscriminate, causing numerous casualties. Such varied, painful memories of the war continue to be recounted across different locations in the Philippines. Fortunately, however, we have built the current amicable relationship over time, without the Filipino people adopting an anti-Japanese stance. Young students from the school attached to the church waved and smiled upon seeing us visit. And it is these Filipino youth who will build the Philippines of the 21st century, and who will interact with Japan and Japanese people in the future. Is it not this peaceful daily life that we, in the present day, must strive to protect through the continuation of the memorial services? Having reached the 80th anniversary of the war's end, the Japan-Philippines relationship is sustained by a **"special friendship"** forged by overcoming past trials.

The trust built upon historical reconciliation strongly binds the two nations toward common goals such as economic development and regional peace. Their trajectory stands as an excellent example of how former enemy nations can reconcile and establish a future-oriented relationship, offering insight into peacebuilding in a world facing growing divisions. The memorial service held annually in the Philippines on the anniversary of the war's end will continue. It is not merely a ceremony of mourning. It could also serve as a strategic venue for memory transmission, where both countries, acknowledging the pain of the past, pledge mutual peace and prosperity for the future.

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The Significance of Japan-Philippines Security Cooperation

Value Lies Not in Overreaching, but in Careful Dialogue Between Democracies

Significance of the RAA's Entry into Force

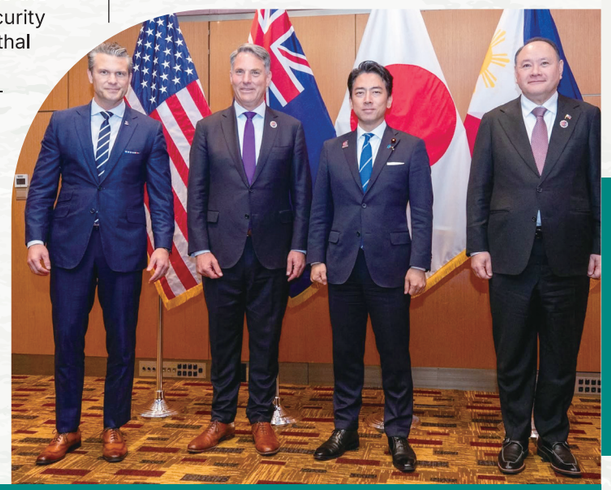
Japan-Philippines cooperation is rapidly expanding in security, alongside traditional areas like economy and culture. Only slightly over three years after the inaugural Foreign and Defense Ministerial Meeting (2+2) in April 2022 (late Duterte administration), the **Reciprocal Access Agreement (RAA)** between Japan and the Philippines entered into force in September 2025.
The RAA secures the status of military units (the Self-Defense Forces/SDF in Japan) and their personnel visiting each country. For instance, when SDF personnel visit the Philippines for training, humanitarian assistance, or disaster relief, it is necessary to simplify or exempt customs procedures related to the entry and exit of personnel and the importation of required materials during their stay. This ensures activities can commence swiftly upon arrival. It also necessitates partially permitting SDF personnel to bring in or carry weapons minimally required for operations. Furthermore, access for units to Philippine ports, ships, airports, and aircraft must be allowed. Measures addressing unforeseen incidents or accidents involving SDF personnel or Filipino citizens during SDF activities must also be pre-arranged.

Military personnel are not diplomats and lack diplomatic immunity; thus, deployments to host nations without such international agreements carry high risk. During the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake, countries like Australia and South Korea deployed military personnel to Japan, assuming this risk. It is incumbent upon democratic nations to legally protect the status of foreign military personnel engaged in disaster relief, joint exercises, or other duty assignments.
Immediately following the RAA's activation, the Japan Air Self-Defense Force participated in training and provided aid following an earthquake in Cebu Island.
Challenges arise when damage is severe, requiring longer unit stays (the SDF stayed in the affected area for one month after Typhoon Haiyan/Yolanda in 2013). In complex crises, such as those where security deteriorates due to disaster, issues include guarding SDF quarters and procuring provisions for personnel. The Acquisition and Cross-Servicing Agreement (ACSA), already substantially agreed upon, legally ensures the **sustainability** of unit operations during such eventualities. Joint military exercises are precisely intended to simulate such situations beforehand.

Prudent Japan, Understanding Philippines

Japan-Philippines security cooperation has certainly not developed merely to confront the threat posed by a specific country. Currently, many people in both nations seem to believe Japan is supporting the Philippines' defense in the South China Sea.
However, Japan's consistent security cooperation objective is the realization of a "**Free and Open Indo-Pacific based on the rule of law,**" and regional peace and stability. Japan and the Philippines have not exchanged international agreements mandating mutual defense obligations, meaning they are **not allies**.
The objective of providing multi-purpose vessels from Japan to the Philippine Coast Guard (PCG) is strictly to enhance the Philippines' law enforcement capability. While these vessels have "consequently" become involved in recent physical confrontations with China Coast Guard ships in the South China Sea, Japan is absolutely not participating in other nations' conflicts.

Defense equipment such as radars provided to the Philippines via Official Security Assistance (OSA) lacks lethal capability.
Japan's cautious stance—non-involvement in other countries' conflicts—is understood by Philippine government officials. According to a 2023 survey conducted by the author with researchers from Ateneo de Manila University, Philippine officials experienced in Japan-Philippine cooperation largely recognized Japan's constitutional Article 9, SDF activity restrictions, and defense equipment transfer principles. Authorities from both democratic nations, Japan and the Philippines, are presumed to be closely consulting on the purpose and scope of permissible cooperation.



Public Opinion Cannot Bear the Weight of Alliance

However, it is also true that the Philippine side harbors excessive expectations regarding Japan's involvement. When then-Foreign Minister Yoko Kamikawa signed the RAA during the second Foreign and Defense Ministerial Meeting (2+2) in Manila in July 2024, she explained in a press conference that "strengthening relations with the Philippines is indispensable for regional peace and stability, and is not aimed at any specific country". In contrast, Philippine media described the RAA signing as a **"quasi-alliance".** It should be noted that the nuance of the term ["quasi-alliance"] is strong.

The Mutual Defense Treaty concluded between the U.S. and the Philippines in 1951 stipulates that "Each Party recognizes that an armed attack in the Pacific area on either of the Parties would be dangerous to its own peace and safety and declares that it will act to meet the common danger in accordance with its constitutional processes". However, this treaty has never been activated.

Some view the 2003 deployment of a "Humanitarian and Reconstruction Assistance Team," including military personnel, to Iraq by the then-Arroyo administration as resulting from U.S. pressure under the MDT. Yet, the U.S. was not under armed attack at that time.
Then-Senator Aquilino "Nene" Pimentel Jr. stated in Congress that the deployment was "for humanitarian assistance and aligns with UN Secretary-General Annan's call for member states to cooperate in the reconstruction of Iraq".

In 2004, following the abduction of a Filipino truck driver in Iraq, then-President Arroyo decided to withdraw the contingent.

Although a U.S. State Department spokesperson expressed disappointment, stating it "sends the wrong message to terrorists," public opinion in the Philippines strongly prioritized the lives of their fellow citizens.

Twenty years later, the author still doubts whether Philippine public opinion can withstand the creation of new mutual defense obligations with countries other than the U.S., or the resulting sacrifices of its citizens. Japanese public opinion is likely just as nervous about sacrificing its military personnel for the peace of another country.

Security cooperation between the two nations has progressed far **more cautiously than generally perceived.**

In 2026, we mark the Japan-Philippines Friendship Year (70th anniversary of normalized relations). How far the two countries can proceed should the regional security environment change more severely remains uncertain. Crucially, however, two democratic nations—bound by the need to heed domestic public opinion—have meticulously built cooperation step by step within a legal framework through careful consultation. This effort serves as the ultimate peaceful alternative model to the actions of the **authoritarian governments** prevalent in the region.

Profile
Saya Kiba Ph.D
Associate Professor Kobe City University of Foreign Studies

After serving as a research fellow at the University of the Philippines, a specialist researcher at the Embassy of Japan in the Philippines, a specialist researcher at the Embassy of Japan in Thailand, and a secretary to a Member of the House of Representatives, she currently holds her present position. Her field of expertise is Southeast Asian politics. She has been a member of the Ministry of Defense's "Expert Panel on Capacity Building Assistance" since 2023.

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The Nightmare of Metro Manila:

Can Japan Save the Traffic Hell Losing $25 Billion Annually?

The Full Scope of the "Project of the Century" Holding the Key to the Philippine Economy

Traffic Hell Clogging the Growth Engine

Metro Manila stands today as one of Asia's most dynamic megacities. However, this frontier of growth is constantly being undermined by severe traffic congestion—a problem almost unparalleled globally. The Metro Manila Subway Project (MMSP), the first subway in the Philippines, is a 33.1-kilometer high-speed transit line traversing the capital region north to south. It is more than just an improvement to transport infrastructure. Dubbed the **"Project of the Century,"** it is positioned as the foundation for modernizing the national transport system and alleviating chronic gridlock. In fact, a robust partnership with Japan is essential when discussing the significance of this enormous project.

The MMSP is being constructed with Japanese Official Development Assistance (ODA) financing and technology, with the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) taking a leading role. Japan is the largest ODA provider to the Philippines, covering approximately 73% of the total project cost of 488.5 billion pesos (around $8.7 billion) through Yen loans. The official goal of the project is to dramatically resolve Manila's notorious traffic issues and unlock the Philippines' economic potential. Whether this subway is realized as planned is considered a critical test of whether the Philippines can avoid the **"middle-income trap"** and move onto a sustainable growth trajectory.

The Cost of "Carmageddon"

Why Manila's Roads Failed

An Urban Cancer Wasting 1.3 Trillion Pesos Annually

The severe congestion plaguing Metro Manila is the tragic result of underdeveloped public transportation infrastructure. Due to the lack of efficient mass transit, over 12 million commuters working in the capital region are pushed onto the roads daily. According to JICA research, the losses inflicted on the Philippine economy by this traffic congestion are immense. As of 2018, the estimated daily economic cost of congestion in Metro Manila reached 3.5 billion pesos (about $70 million). This figure sharply increased from 2.4 billion pesos a day in 2012, and it was predicted that without countermeasures, it could swell to 5.4 billion pesos daily by 2035. Mid-term analysis calculated the annual loss at 1.3 trillion pesos, or about **$24 billion to $25 billion**, acting as an enormous drag on GDP growth. From an economic perspective, logistics and business operations are severely affected by unpredictable transit times. Deliveries take longer, costs increase, and employees arrive exhausted or late. This bottleneck reduces Manila's appeal as an investment destination. JICA's study concluded and warned that without large-scale transport improvements, the city risks **"paralysis,"** curtailing a substantial portion of its growth.

PHILIPPINE TOPICS Metro Manila Subway Project

The Inefficiency of Commuting That Burdens the Public

These figures also have profound implications for human life. Manila commuters are routinely forced to endure one-way commutes of two to five hours.

For example, a young professional living in Quezon City, Northern Metro Manila, spends four hours daily commuting to and from Makati City, using buses, jeepneys, and trains. This means that time meant for work, study, family, and rest is being wasted, significantly lowering the quality of life (QOL) and labor productivity.

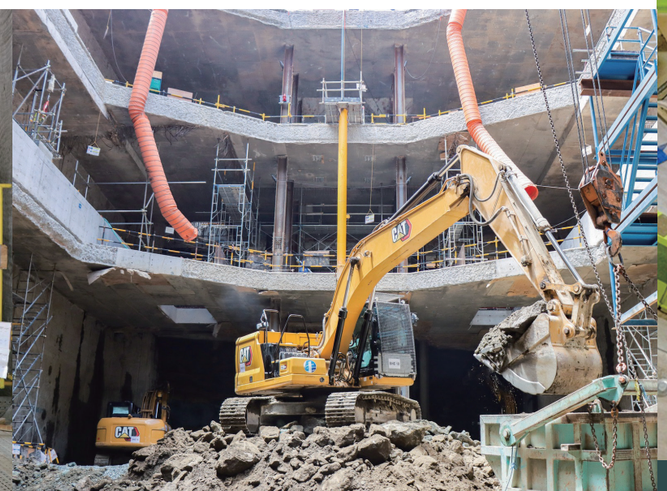
Many people wake up before dawn and return home late at night, losing leisure and family time.

A 40-Year Railway Laggard:

The Structural Ailment Behind Being the Only ASEAN Capital Without a Subway

The Negative Legacy of Road-Centric Policies

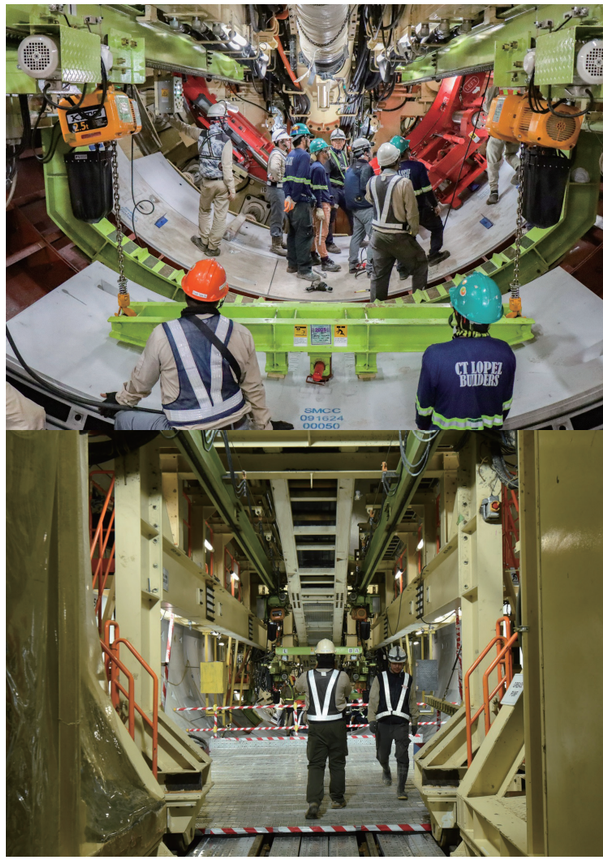
Despite the Philippines being the first Southeast Asian country to build a Light Rail Transit (Manila's LRT-1, 1984), it lagged significantly behind its neighbors in rail infrastructure development for decades afterward. Multiple factors explain why the construction of a subway in Manila is only happening now. The biggest factor is historical underinvestment and neglect. Following the rail boom in the early 20th century, the Philippine rail network declined due to war damage, natural disasters, and government neglect. Of the 1,100 km of track at its peak, only about **130 km** is currently operational. While spending on railways was chronically insufficient, road construction was prioritized. Consequently, the percentage of transport accounted for by rail dropped dramatically; currently, over **98%** of passenger transport and 55% of freight transport in the Philippines rely on roads

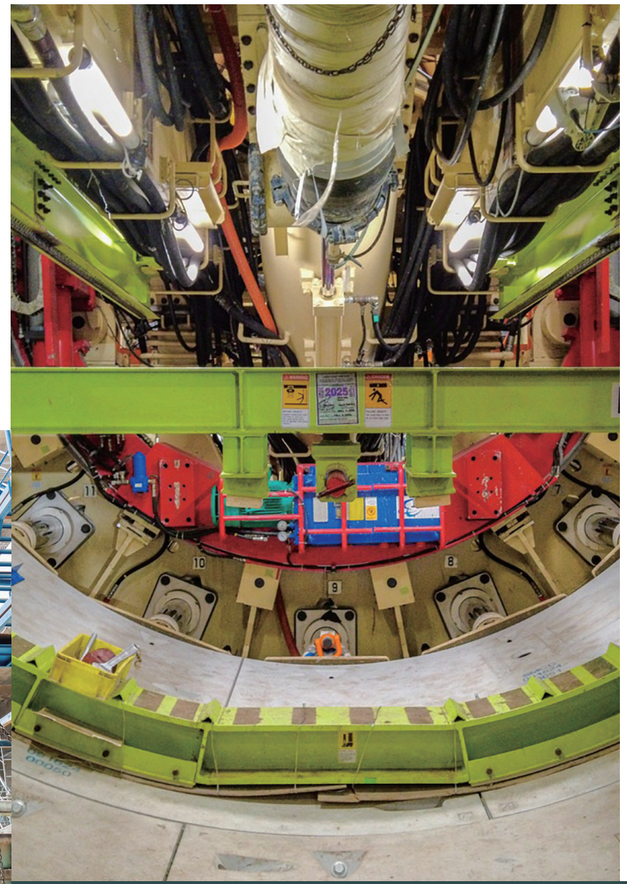


Political Turmoil and the Cost Barrier

The Philippines experienced economic stagnation and political turmoil in the late 20th century (such as the 1980s debt crisis and the post-1986 political transition), which restricted capital and political will for large-scale infrastructure. In fact, plans to build a subway in Manila existed decades ago.

JICA proposed a subway route in the 1970s, but leaders at the time shelved the plan citing prohibitive costs and technical challenges. Underground construction is expensive, and previous administrations chose cheaper elevated rail or opted not to build anything. However, the situation has now reversed. As former transport officials point out, there was once space to build elevated railways, but now the city is so congested and land acquisition above ground has become prohibitively costly, making the shift to a subway unavoidable.





Policy Fragmentation and Institutional Barriers

Furthermore, the Philippines lacked a sustained, long-term transportation development plan until very recently. Only in the late 2010s, as part of the Duterte administration's (2016–2022) **"Build, Build, Build"** infrastructure push, was political will finally gathered, leading to the subway's approval and revival.

In essence, the Philippines' slow adoption of a subway resulted from a combination of economic constraints, road-prioritizing policies, and institutional challenges. However, worsening congestion and a growing economy made investment in rail an unavoidable choice.

The groundbreaking of the subway in 2019 thus symbolizes a long-overdue course correction toward modernizing urban transport.

JICA's "Largest-Ever Commitment":

Japan's Massive Technical Prowess Driven by 0.1% Ultra-Low Interest

Exceptional Terms and Provision of Technical Expertise

As previously mentioned, the primary reason the Metro Manila Subway Project (MMSP) became feasible as the **"Project of the Century"** is Japan's comprehensive support. JICA provided the largest single loan commitment to any country for this project. The first Yen loan (104.53 billion yen, approx. $935 million) was signed in 2018, followed by a second loan (253.3 billion yen) in 2022. These loans are offered under JICA's Special Terms for Economic Partnership (STEP), and their conditions are exceptional. The interest rate is a mere **0.1%** per annum, with a repayment period of 40 years (including a grace period of 12–13 years). These terms themselves underscore the importance the Japanese government places on the Philippines' development. Crucially, Japan's contribution extends beyond financing to technical expertise. Due to the nature of the STEP program, the ODA financing is linked to the use of Japanese expertise and equipment, with Japanese technology and companies leading the construction. Major civil works are handled by Japanese-led joint ventures, and state-of-the-art Tunnel Boring Machines (TBMs) manufactured through Japanese engineering have been introduced.

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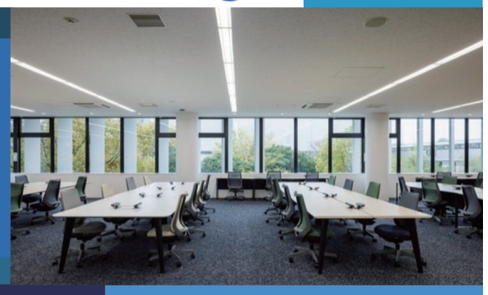

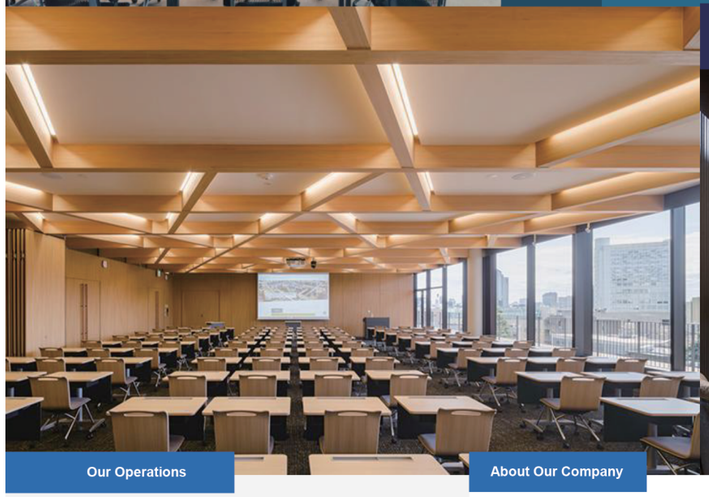

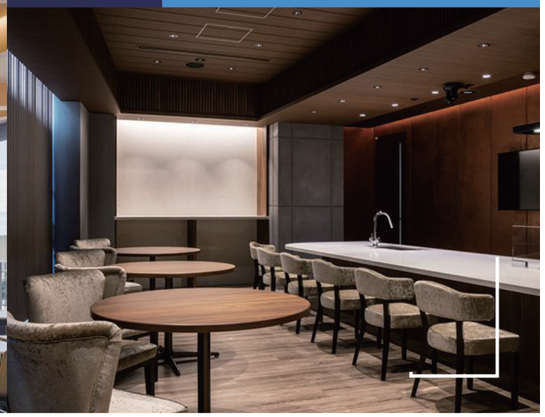

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Japan is applying its extensive experience in underground excavation and disaster-resilient design to the Philippines. Japanese companies are also slated to supply the subway cars, signaling systems, and other high-tech components. These technical contributions ensure the subway meets rigorous standards for safety, reliability, and disaster resilience. This is critically important for a city frequently affected by earthquakes and floods. Project stakeholders emphasize that the MMSP incorporates designs that can withstand natural disasters like earthquakes and typhoons, such as seismic resistance engineered to tolerate Magnitude 7–8 quakes, and flood mitigation measures (drainage pump stations and water gates).

The MMSP is truly a flagship project of Japan-Philippine cooperation. Japan's low-interest financing and advanced engineering have made this long-awaited dream a reality, highlighting the diplomatic and developmental bonds between the two nations

PHILIPPINE TOPICS Metro Manila Subway Project

2025, Excavating the Capital's Underground:

The Core Delay, The Fight for "Land Acquisition"

Are Project Delays the Inevitable Growing Pains?

The MMSP groundbreaking took place in February 2019, with the initial goal of achieving full or partial operation by 2025. However, reality has not kept pace with the plan. As of 2025, construction is ongoing, but the project is facing delays. Reports in late 2024 showed civil works progress at approximately 16%. By the end of 2025, overall major construction progress, including the design and procurement stages, is reported to be around **50%.**
The Department of Transportation (DOTr) has reaffirmed its revised goal: partial operation from Valenzuela to Quirino Highway by 2028, and full operation start by **2032.**

The Weight of Political Commitment

Despite the delays, the commitment to complete the project is extremely strong. Billions of pesos have already been spent, and sections of the tunnel are excavated, making the project too critical to abandon. The President emphasized the subway's achievements in his 2023 State of the Nation Address, positioning it as part of a nationwide **"rail renaissance"**. In August 2025, a large delegation from the JICA Parliamentarians' League, including members of Japan's House of Representatives, inspected the deep underground construction site. They witnessed the ongoing tunnel excavation (approx. **250 meters dug**) and reaffirmed the project's importance for mitigating Manila's traffic and improving citizens' QOL.
While the completion timeline has been pushed back, the political will and Japan-Philippine partnership remain firm. The DOTr aims to achieve 100% land acquisition by 2026; if these challenges are overcome, Manila commuters will finally be able to ride the subway in the early 2030s.

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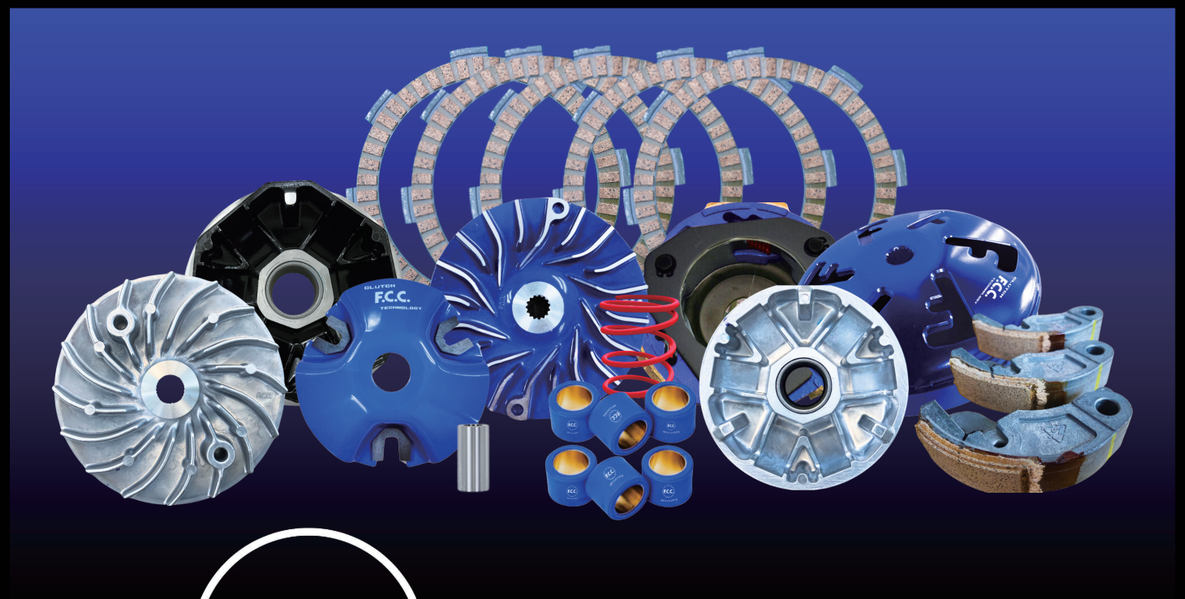

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Established in 1993 and located in the Laguna Technopark, Biñan City, Laguna, FCC (Philippines) Corp. is a member of the FCC Group, a Japan-based global leader in clutch integrated manufacturing founded in 1939. The FCC Group operates 29 facilities in 10 countries and supplies its products to leading automotive and motorcycle brands such as Honda, Toyota, Suzuki, Yamaha, Kawasaki, BMW, Ducati, and Harley-Davidson, among others. Globally, the Group holds a remarkable 53.1% share of the two-wheel clutch market and 12.5% share in four-wheel clutch systems.

As a PEZA-registered company, FCC Philippines supports the Group's worldwide operations through the manufacture and assembly of high-quality clutch components. In line with the FCC Group's direction toward electrification, the company also aims to localize the production of swing arm motors and geared motors for e-scooters and e-trikes, with the cooperation of other FCC facilities. This planned initiative reflects the company's commitment to contribute to the growth of the Philippine electric vehicle supply chain and to introduce advanced Japanese technology to the local market.

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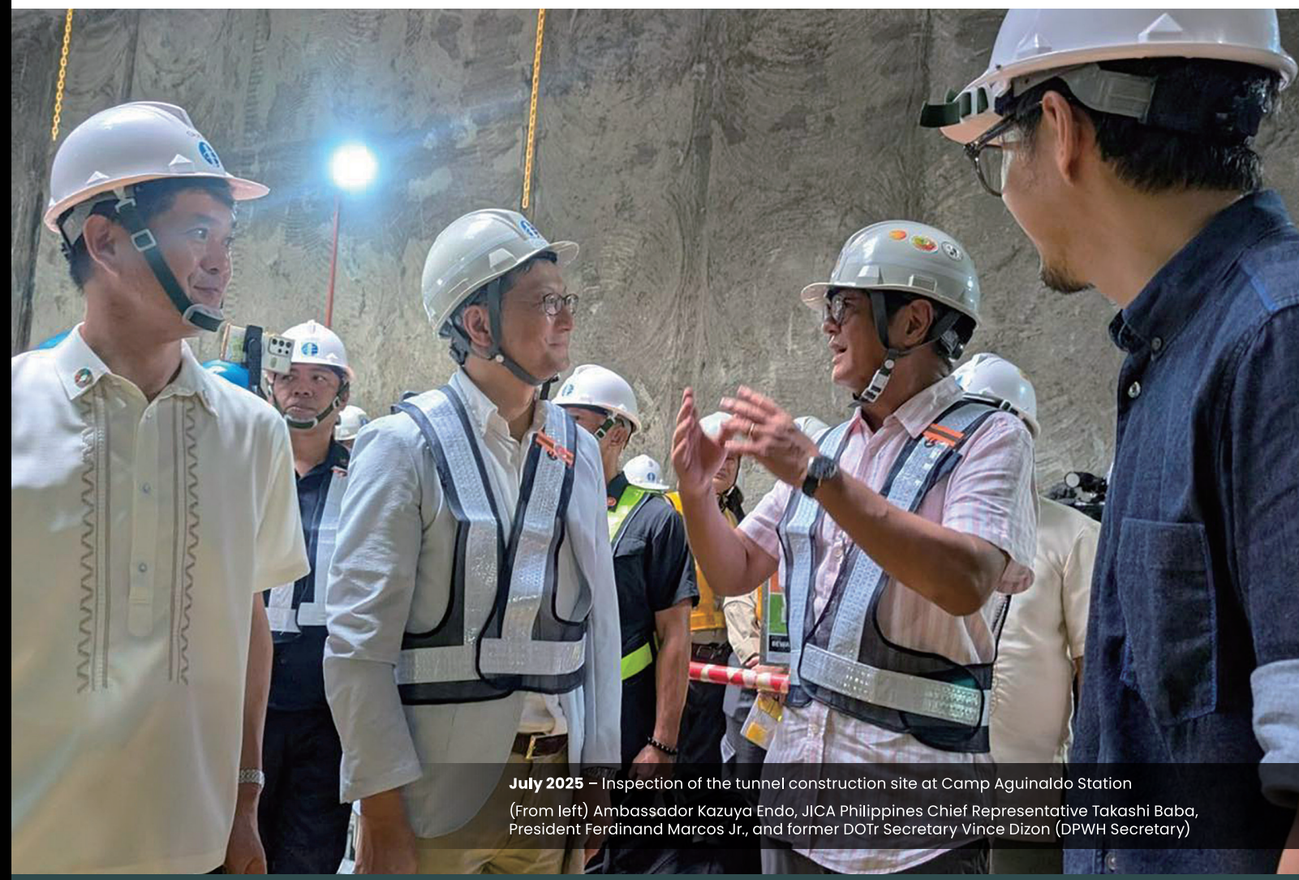
The Key to Turning the "Demographic Dividend" into Economic Growth:

The Subway Reshapes the City's Future

Youthful Population Driving 5%+ Growth

The significance of the MMSP is closely linked to the structural economic strength the Philippines currently enjoys: the **Demographic Dividend.** As of 2025, the Philippine economy shows resilience and robust growth prospects. The IMF forecasts the Philippines' GDP growth rate to accelerate to about **5.5%** in 2025 and approximately 5.8% in 2026, which is one of the fastest growth rates in ASEAN.
The structural strength of the Philippine population lies in having a relatively large working-age population (15–64 years) and a decreasing dependency ratio. Over **64%** of Filipinos are of working age, contrasting with neighboring countries (like China and Thailand) which face aging populations and are losing this advantage.

This **"window of opportunity"** is expected to last around 25 years until about 2045. Experts suggest that if leveraged properly, this young workforce, which drives productivity and innovation, offers an opportunity "to experience economic growth unlike any seen before". However, maximizing this demographic bonus requires infrastructure development. The loss of billions of pesos due to Manila's traffic congestion is precisely the bottleneck negating this demographic bonus effect.



July 2025 – Inspection of the tunnel construction site at Camp Aguinaldo Station
(From left) Ambassador Kazuya Endo, JICA Philippines Chief Representative Takashi Baba, President Ferdinand Marcos Jr., and former DOTr Secretary Vince Dizon (DPWH Secretary)

Unleashing Productivity Through Transportation Network

Infrastructure development (like the subway) plays a decisive role in improving access to jobs and services for the growing labor force, thereby boosting labor productivity and geographical mobility. The Marcos administration's "Philippine Development Plan 2023–2028" emphasizes allocating **5% to 6%** of GDP to infrastructure spending annually, viewing it as indispensable for both short-term economic stimulus and long-term competitiveness.

The urban transformation brought about by the subway can be summarized in the following three points:

1 | Modern and Integrated Urban Mobility:

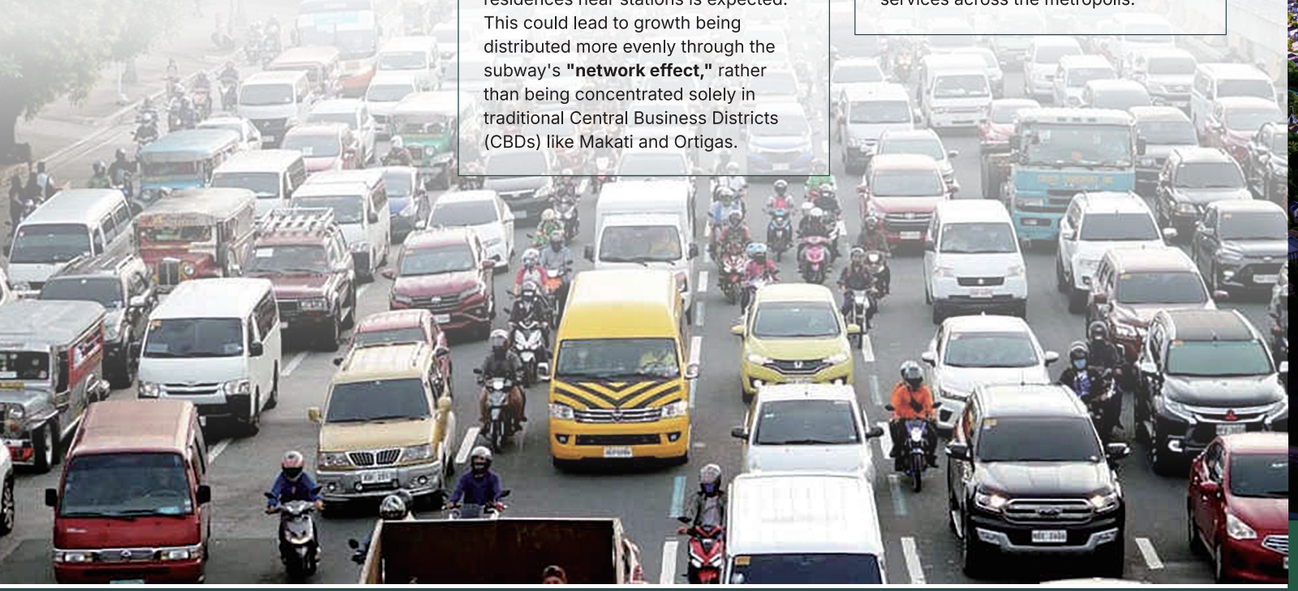
The MMSP will form the backbone of Manila's public transportation network. Integrated with existing LRT/MRT lines and future North-South Commuter Rail, it will establish the first seamless high-speed transit network across the entire capital region. This will enable residents to travel quickly and affordably, potentially restructuring their lifestyles. Urban planners are focused on the concept of the **"15-minute city,"** meaning Manila will move closer to the ideal of a more livable city through dramatically shortened commute times and quick access to jobs and amenities.

2 | Economic Catalyst and Real Estate Development:

Mass transit systems have historically propelled economic activity along their routes. Analysts already predict rising land and property values in areas surrounding stations. By improving connectivity, the MMSP will make previously underserved or peripheral areas attractive locations for new commercial and residential projects. For example, EastWood in Quezon City, Capitol Commons in Pasig City, and BGC or Arca South in Taguig City have the potential to blossom as new business hubs. Real estate developers are anticipating this, with many new condominium projects touting proximity to future subway stations. The emergence of **Transit-Oriented Developments (TODs)** featuring mixed-use complexes, offices, and residences near stations is expected. This could lead to growth being distributed more evenly through the subway's **"network effect,"** rather than being concentrated solely in traditional Central Business Districts (CBDs) like Makati and Ortigas.

3 | Social Inclusion and QOL Improvement:

A reliable subway system socially connects the city. While transportation currently exacerbates socioeconomic disparities in Manila, the subway will offer a fast, safe, air-conditioned means of travel at an affordable fare (expected to be subsidized) for all citizens. As seen in the example of the Quezon City commuter mentioned earlier, a four-hour commute requiring multiple transfers will be dramatically shortened by the subway, increasing time for family, rest, and productive activities. Commuting becoming feasible will also enhance access to opportunities, such as residents of Quezon City taking jobs in Alabang or Parañaque. By doing so, the MMSP contributes to more inclusive growth, broadening access to jobs and services across the metropolis.



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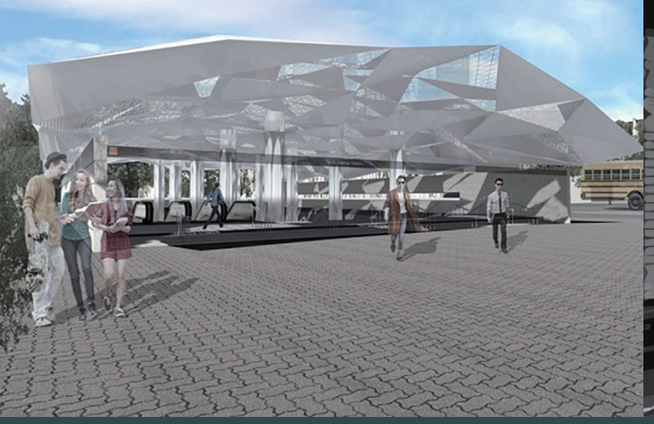

Conclusion: Towards Asia's Growth Axis. The Track Record of "Co-Creation" Japan is Proud of

The Metro Manila Subway demonstrates the Philippines' serious commitment to tackling long-standing urban problems and elevating its infrastructure to international standards, lighting the way toward a more efficient, sustainable, and equitable urban future. Success means international recognition of the Philippines' capability to execute large-scale modern infrastructure projects, significantly boosting investor confidence. Infrastructure has long been a constraint on much Foreign Direct Investment (FDI), including BPO, tourism, and manufacturing; overcoming this directly links to national leapfrog growth. However, this optimistic outlook hinges on the premise that the subway is actually completed and operated effectively. As current delays indicate, the path is far from simple. The success of the MMSP is not just about solving today's traffic problems (congestion); it is about future-proofing Metro Manila. It is a future where Manila is never again called an infrastructural "laggard," and where the daily struggles of commuters are alleviated by the efficiency of a world-class subway system.

Here, we must reaffirm the decisive role Japan has played in this massive transformation. JICA's largest-ever ODA commitment and the application of Japan's disaster-resilient technology and engineering are more than mere economic aid. They represent the deep diplomatic and developmental bonds between Japan and the Philippines, contributing to a fundamental qualitative improvement in Philippine social infrastructure and enhancing the lives of millions of Filipinos.

The completion of the MMSP not only heralds the beginning of a new era for the Philippines but also serves as concrete proof of the culmination of the value of "high-quality infrastructure" fostered by Japan and the spirit of "co-creation" that genuinely supports Asian development. As we look forward to the Philippine economy's leap forward, we Japanese should feel deep pride in our contribution to this great project.

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Artist's rendering of the completed Metro Manila Subway stations

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The Philippines' Unprecedented Pet Boom

A $700M Market Fueled by Urban Loneliness and a Lifestyle Revolution

In the Philippines, particularly Metropolitan Manila, a social transformation is underway, defying conventional norms—a revolution centered on pets

The market size and momentum, confirmed by data, are immense. Surveys show that **over 80% of Filipino households own a pet**—an exceptionally high pet ownership rate in Asia. The estimated animal population is staggering: approximately 17.2 million dogs and 10.6 million cats as of 2022, totaling around 28 million animals.

Driven by this demand, the Philippine pet industry is accelerating rapidly. The pet food market, in particular, shows exceptional growth, projected to expand at a CAGR exceeding 30% from its 2021 size of roughly $200 million to an estimated **$511 million by 2025.** The entire pet care market is anticipated to reach approximately **$681.3 million by 2029,** effectively doubling its size since 2018.

This explosive growth is more than a fleeting trend; it represents a **"Lifestyle Revolution"** underpinned by the nation's economic maturity, shifting family structures, and fundamental changes in youth values. The epicenter of this craze is Metro Manila, which accounts for an estimated 60-70% of the domestic pet food share.

This nascent yet burgeoning market presents a significant business opportunity for foreign companies, including those from Japan. Rising incomes and a stronger focus on quality will inevitably generate high demand for Japan's advanced products and services.

I

The Staggering Scale

The Economic Impact of 28 Million 'Family Members'

The Philippine pet market is characterized by its enormous number of owned animals and strong consumer spending.

1 The 'Daily Economic Sphere' Created by 83% Ownership

The 83% household pet ownership rate is fundamentally reshaping the retail and service sectors. As pets become integral to daily life, related industries have doubled in the past five years, now totaling approximately **$108 million (13 billion pesos).** Peripheral businesses—salons, hotels, supplements, and wellness products—are also seeing solid growth.

With the deep-seated belief that "pets are family," malls and restaurants are rapidly adapting. For instance, Fisher Mall in Quezon City regularly hosts pet-focused events, and incredibly, some cinemas now offer pet-friendly screenings. This symbolizes a societal shift where pet-related spending is routinely allocated for entertainment and services.

2 Pet Food Market Surges, Driven by Over 30% Annual Growth

The pet food sector is the primary growth driver. It is forecasted to grow at an estimated annual rate of 18.5% between 2024 and 2029, making its speed of expansion among the fastest in Asia.

Recognizing this potential, international competition is intensifying. The US Pet Food Institute, focusing on the Philippines, has invested a significant $13 million to bolster promotion. This confirms the nation's clear positioning as the next key frontier in the Asian market.

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II Loneliness and Economic Logic

Why Millennials Choose Pets Over Children

The pet boom in the Philippines is not merely a result of economic growth; it is deeply connected to the pandemic and the lifestyle revolution of the millennial generation.

1 Demographic Shock and the 'Economic Rationale'

Lately, young couples in the Philippines are prioritizing financial stability and postponing having children. A survey by the Commission on Population and Development (CPD) found an increasing number of couples who prefer to own a pet before having a child, citing economic reasons.

Consequently, the nation’s total fertility rate has dropped to 1.9, below the 2.1 needed for population replacement. For a country traditionally characterized by large families, this demographic shift is profoundly serious and dramatic.

While child-rearing involves substantial economic stress, owning a pet (especially a dog) offers emotional fulfillment, comfort (*"healing"*), and the sense of having a "family," all at a relatively lower cost. Like their US counterparts, Filipino Millennials are increasingly adopting a pet-centric lifestyle, solidifying the belief that "pets are family".

2 Pandemic Acceleration: The Thirst for Comfort

The prolonged lockdowns during the COVID-19 pandemic starting in 2020 intensified loneliness and stress among urban dwellers. Seeking to improve Quality of Life (QOL) and gain mental stability while confined at home, there was a sharp surge in Filipinos adopting dogs and cats as family members. The many reported cases of people seeking adoption for emotional comfort during the pandemic perfectly encapsulate this historical context.

III

Consumer Polarization

82% Demand Premium Quality

Consumer trends in the pet market reflect the structure of the Philippine economy and show a tendency toward polarization.

1 Affluent Consumption Focused on Uncompromising Quality

Dog and cat food dominates the pet supplies market, but a distinct premiumization trend is emerging. Demand is soaring for high-quality, organic-focused dry food and functional health supplements; many owners prefer imported kibble/organic dry food.

Intriguingly, owner surveys reveal that **82% prioritize their pet's "food quality and nutrition"** above all else. This reflects not just owner affection but a growing consciousness of investing in health, driven by rising income levels. Spending on non-food items—such as pet apparel, carriers, and toys—is also increasing, mainly among high-income earners. Conversely, many lower-income households still feed their pets table scraps (human leftovers), indicating a clear polarization in feeding habits.

2 Hidden Growth Stock: The Untapped Potential of the Cat Market

Although historically canine-centric, the Philippine pet market is broadening due to the increasing cat ownership rate (estimated at 39.3% of all households). GlobalPETS research confirms a rise in search demand for cat-related products, including food, cages, and cat towers. Notably, the demand for daily necessities and care products is growing faster in the cat market compared to the dog market. This likely reflects the tendency for cats to be kept indoors, fueling the expansion of specialized cat supply stores and brands.

IV

Digitalization and Value-Added Services

Opportunities for Japanese Businesses

The expansion of the Philippine pet market is also bringing transformation to distribution channels and service structures.

1 Online Surge and Social Media Commerce

Supermarkets and hypermarkets remain the dominant pet food purchasing channel at about 46%, followed by specialty pet stores (28%) and online sales (21%). The sharp growth of e-commerce and social media channels deserves attention.

D2C sales via platforms like TikTok Shop are surging, particularly among younger demographics, substantially increasing the online purchase ratio. This demonstrates how digital adoption and social media saturation are radically transforming consumer behavior.

2 Veterinary Services: A Critical Supply-Demand Gap

The service market is also expanding, with a rise in grooming salons, pet hotels, and pet cafes, primarily in urban centers. Driven by increased hygiene awareness and the "pets as family" trend, owners are spending more on grooming, training, and daycare services. Veterinary care is the most commonly utilized service category. However, the Philippines faces a critical challenge: a severe shortage of veterinarians. Reports indicate a high animal-to-veterinarian ratio (approximately one vet per 10,000 animals), suggesting that the supply of veterinary medicine lags far behind demand.
This specific healthcare gap offers a massive entry point for Japanese businesses specializing in high-quality veterinary technology, supplements, and online vet consultation services.

3 The Niche Market Bornfrom Wellness Trends

The growth of the Philippine economy has heightened public interest in health and leisure. In urban areas, wellness trends are soaring, with running becoming a new lifestyle. This is solidifying a well-being culture that emphasizes walking pets and outdoor activities.

Cities like Manila, Pasay, and Makati have established Sunday "car-free zones," shutting down main roads for citizens to use as exercise space. This move symbolizes both rising health consciousness and the awareness of repurposing urban spaces.

This new lifestyle generates demand for "health-focused" niche services, including pet fitness and training classes, high-value functional supplements, and diet/care foods.

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The National Driver

Pet Industry, World Pet Expo 2025, and Future Vision

Expectations for the Philippine pet industry are exceptionally high, even at the government level.

The "World Pet Expo 2025," held in Pasay in September 2025, attracted significant attention as a massive comprehensive pet exhibition. Over 150 companies and organizations exhibited, embodying the market's dynamism.
Government dignitaries, including the Pasay City Mayor, the Director of the Department of Agriculture's Bureau of Animal Industry, and the Assistant Secretary of the Department of Trade and Industry, delivered congratulatory speeches at the opening ceremony. This clearly indicates that the pet industry is recognized not merely as a private business but as a vital pillar of economic growth, contributing to employment and tax revenue at the national and local levels.

Conclusion

Why Japanese Companies Must Enter the Philippines Now

The Philippine pet market is a massive sector, projected to approach $700 million by 2029, and is set to continueexpanding with a CAGR exceeding 16%.

This growth is sustained by powerful structural changes: the nation's economic maturation as it aims for "Upper Middle-Income Country" status and the "Family Revolution" spearheaded by Millennials.

The compelling reason for Japanese entry lies in the Philippines' strong quality orientation.

In a market where 82% of owners prioritize food quality, Japan's technological expertise and safety standards serve as a major differentiator. Areas where Japanese firms can excel include premium dry food, functional supplements, and addressing the shortfall in veterinary services (pet insurance and online consultation technology).

The Philippines is moving beyond the perception of a "poor developing country," giving rise to a new class of urban consumers pursuing well-being. This huge, quality-driven market represents the next growth frontier in Asia for Japan's pet-related industries. The opportune moment to ride this wave—before the market fully matures and international competition becomes hyper-intense—**is right now.**

Magazine linked video

Access to related videos via this QR code

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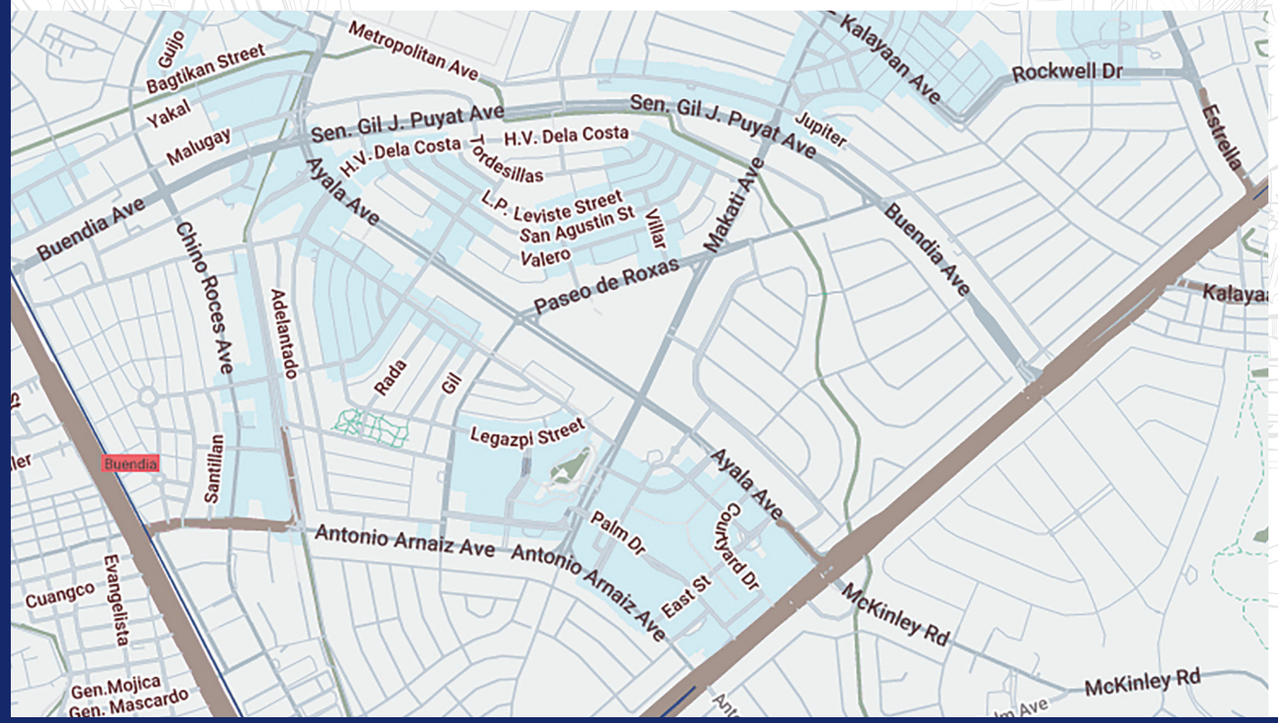
MAKATI

METRO MANILA LIFESTYLE GUIDE

Makati

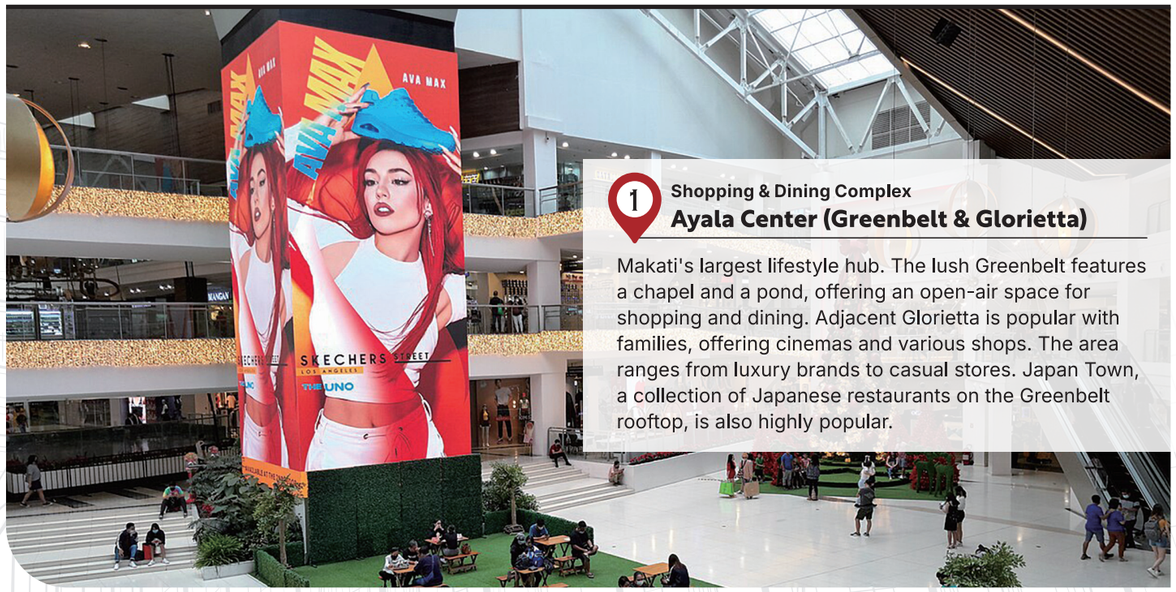
MAKATI CBD

Makati's Central Business District (CBD) is the Philippines' premier financial hub. Ayala Avenue and Makati Avenue are lined with skyscrapers, hosting major global corporations, embassies, luxury hotels, malls, and fine dining establishments. Amidst the business bustle, the Ayala Triangle Gardens, lush with palm and acacia trees, offers a green oasis in the city center where you can relax. From high-end shopping to art appreciation and nightlife, Makati allows visitors to experience diverse attractions at once. It is a safe, vibrant, and highly walkable city.



MAKATI

Featured Spots



1 **Shopping & Dining Complex**

Ayala Center (Greenbelt & Glorietta)

Makati's largest lifestyle hub. The lush Greenbelt features a chapel and a pond, offering an open-air space for shopping and dining. Adjacent Glorietta is popular with families, offering cinemas and various shops. The area ranges from luxury brands to casual stores. Japan Town, a collection of Japanese restaurants on the Greenbelt rooftop, is also highly popular.

2 **Art & History**

Ayala Museum

A modern museum housing archaeological artifacts, indigenous textiles, and paintings. The highlight is the "Diorama Experience," 60 intricate dioramas vividly recreating Philippine history. A recommended spot for those wanting to delve deep into the culture.

3 **City Park**

Ayala Triangle Gardens

A triangular park in the heart of the business district. A relaxing spot with comfortable lawns and shade, popular for jogging and picnics. During Christmas, the "Festival of Lights," a spectacular light and sound show, creates a magical atmosphere.

4 **Japanese Food Area**

Little Tokyo & Makati Central Square

A Japanese dining street located a few blocks from the CBD. Authentic ramen, sushi, okonomiyaki, and takoyaki can be enjoyed beneath red lanterns in the atmospheric courtyard. Stores selling Japanese groceries are also popular. A beloved "delicious" staple spot for Japanese expats and local Japanese culture fans.

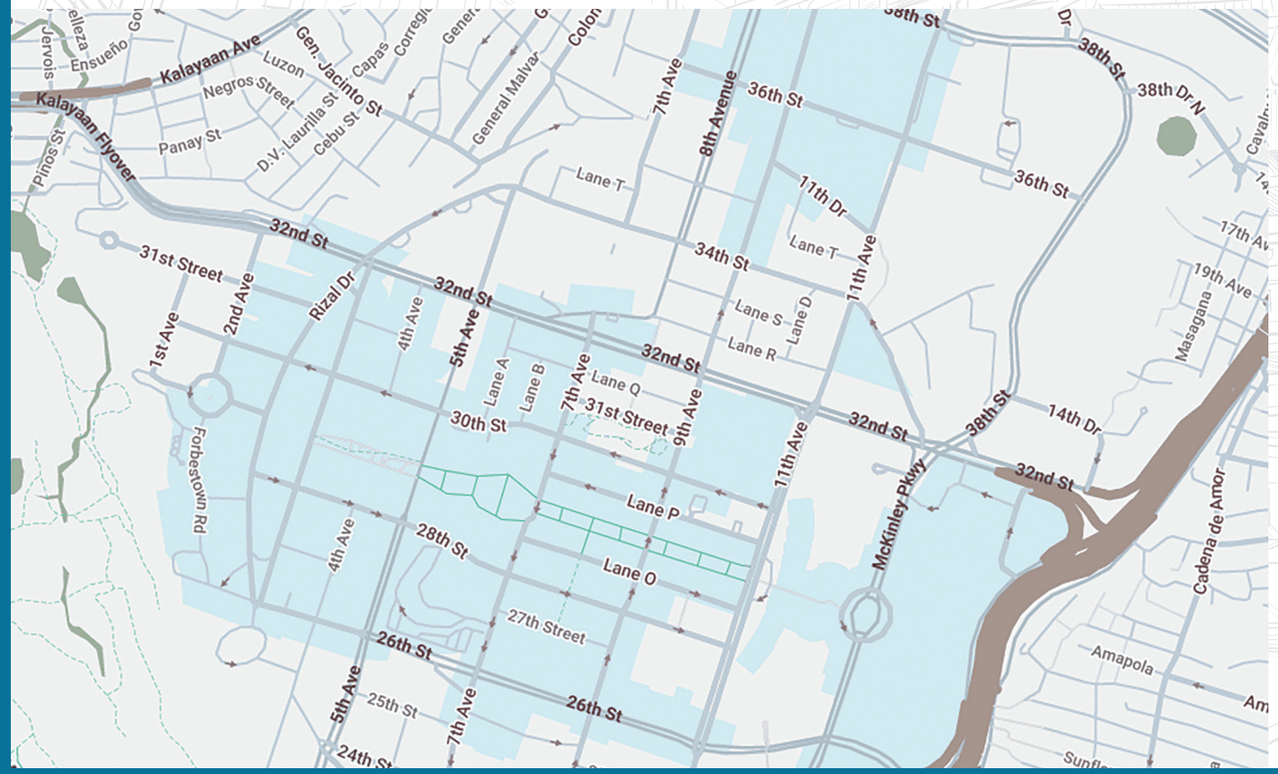
BGC

METRO MANILA LIFESTYLE GUIDE

BGC

BONIFACIO GLOBAL CITY (BGC)

Commonly known as **"BGC"** or **"The Fort"**. Since the 1990s, this former military base has been redeveloped into a modern, international business and lifestyle district. Streets are orderly, utility poles are buried underground, and modern skyscrapers, condominiums, and art installations line the area. Well-maintained sidewalks and parks are buzzing from morning till night with people enjoying jogging and yoga.



BGC

Featured Spots

1 Outdoor Shopping & Dining

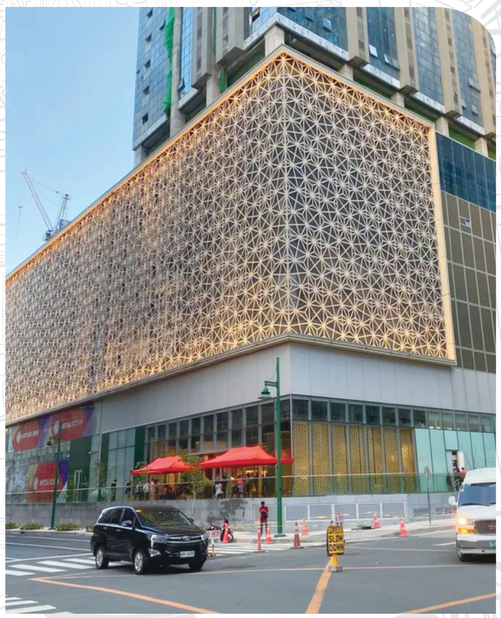
Bonifacio High Street

A 1km commercial boulevard lush with greenery. Weekends are busy with families and people with pets, featuring street performances and markets. Hotels like SEDA and Shangri-La are also conveniently located here.

2 Japanese-Style Shopping Mall

MITSUKOSHI BGC

The first Philippine mall of the Japanese brand "Mitsukoshi," opened in 2022. Visitors can experience the Japanese lifestyle, featuring stores like Nitori (furniture), Kinokuniya bookstore, and gourmet food in the basement depachika. It is rapidly gaining popularity among Japanese residents and Filipino Japan fans alike.



3 Interactive Science Center

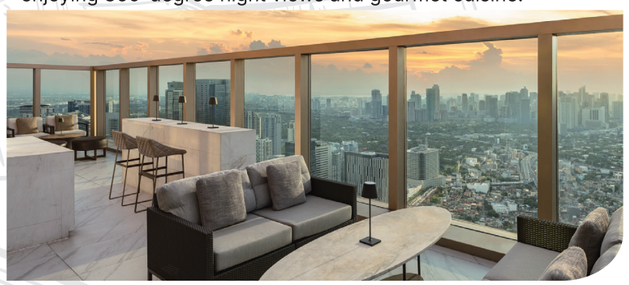
The Mind Museum

A science museum with over 250 interactive exhibits, including dinosaur skeletons and space displays. Allows children and adults to learn about science in an engaging way.

4 Rooftop Bar & Restaurant

The Peak (Grand Hyatt)

A luxury bar and restaurant on the top floor of the Philippines' tallest skyscraper hotel. Known as an exclusive venue for enjoying 360-degree night views and gourmet cuisine.



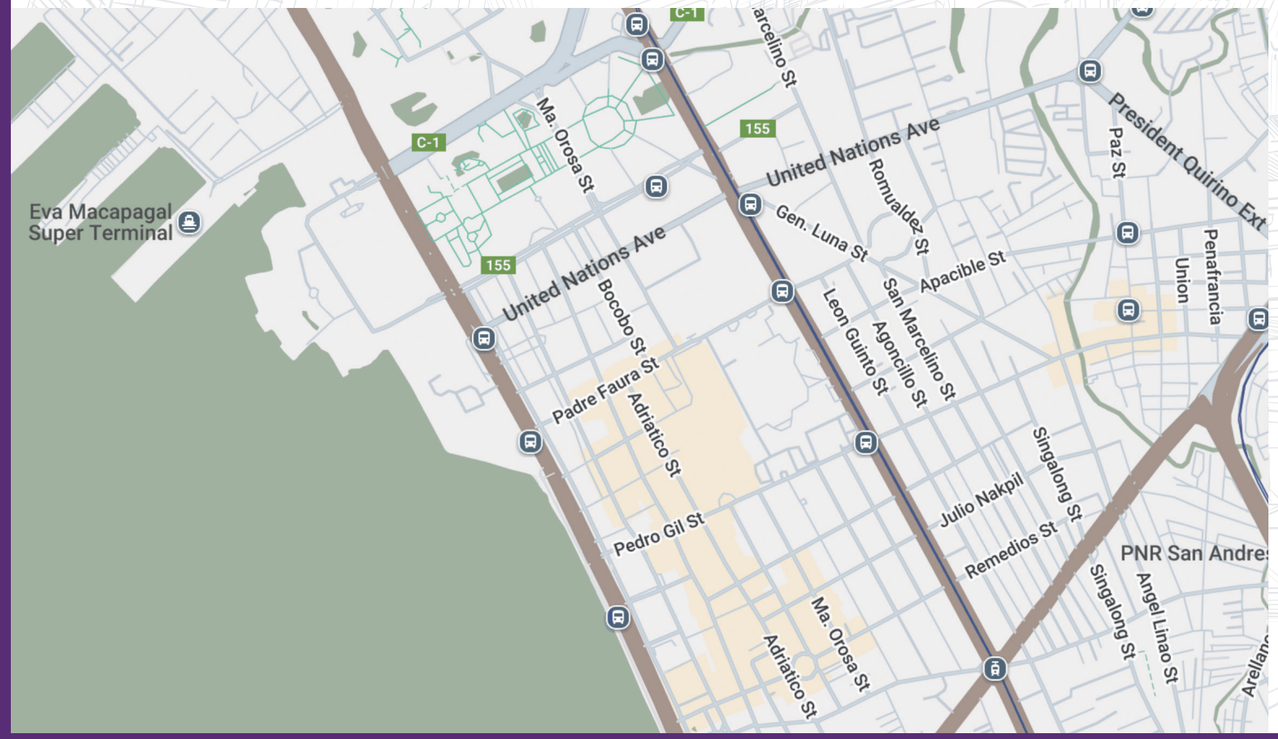
MALATE -ERMITA

METRO MANILA LIFESTYLE GUIDE

Malate

MALATE-ERMITA DISTRICT

This area, facing Manila Bay, merges history, culture, and nightlife. Ermita concentrates major tourist spots like the National Museum complex and Rizal Park. Adjacent Malate features a nostalgic townscape with old churches and tree-lined streets. Along Roxas Boulevard's Baywalk, visitors can enjoy the sunset over Manila Bay, renowned as one of the world's three great sunsets. At night, Malate, long a nightlife hub, buzzes with people enjoying live bands, dancing, and dining.



MALATE - ERMITA

Featured Spots

1 **Historical Park**

Rizal Park (Luneta)

A beautiful park featuring the statue of Philippine national hero, Rizal. Well-maintained lawns and fountains draw locals in the evening, and a light show is held at night. The surrounding area boasts the **National Museum complex** (Art, Anthropology, Natural History), where visitors can experience art, history, and nature simultaneously. Highlights include master paintings from the Spanish colonial era, prehistoric relics, and a massive whale skeleton.

2 **Aquarium Theme Park**

Manila Ocean Park

A modern aquarium exhibiting over 14,000 species of marine life. Features like the glass underwater tunnel and the penguin exhibit make it enjoyable for all ages.

3 **Major Mall**

Robinsons Place Manila

A huge mall housing over 500 shops. Popular with tourists and students, it offers shopping, restaurants, cinemas, and spas.

4 **Nightlife**

Remedios Circle Area

Malate's social hub, bustling nightly with live bars and clubs, including the long-established "Cafe Adriatico".

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Editor's Note

Launching *PHILIPPINE TOPICS*

We are delighted to launch the free magazine, **PHILIPPINE TOPICS.** We extend our sincere gratitude to all readers and viewers who have continuously supported our activities.

Our journey began modestly in March 2022. Our core mission was simple: **"To share the real Philippines with as many people as possible"** To achieve this, we have used YouTube and SNS to disseminate videos covering local news, people's lives, and cultural charm. We have always prioritized on-site, direct reporting. This approach has consistently garnered supportive feedback, affirming that our coverage helps viewers "feel the now of the Philippines".

Our YouTube platform, the "Philippine General Information Channel" broadcasts various forms of content as "programs" ranging from news to wide-ranging interviews and entertainment.

This includes our weekly Sunday morning show, "News Catch-up" which summarizes the week's Philippine news, as well as interview programs featuring key Filipino figures and Japanese business leaders sharing their challenges in the Philippines.

Through this intensive reporting, we felt strongly that the country's vigor, people's smiles, and atmosphere could not be fully conveyed through video alone. We developed a desire to share this energy more thoroughly and carefully using a method unique to print media. After continuous internal planning and deliberation, in December 2025, we launch this free magazine, PHILIPPINE TOPICS, marking our advance to a new stage. We aim to deliver a "Philippines you can hold and feel" by providing detailed information that video could not capture.

The Magazine's Two Key Features

01 Simultaneous Japanese/English Publication

This bilingual approach is the magazine's foremost characteristic. Composed in both languages, it is designed to be widely accessible to Japanese visitors (for tourism and business) and to Filipinos residing here. We are pleased if this publication serves as a "**bridge**" fostering reliable exchange between readers and viewers across cultures.

02 Print/Video Hybrid Deployment

The magazine works in conjunction with our YouTube channel, "Philtopi". Many inaugural articles reconfigure topics from "News Catch-up" and other shows, providing context missed in video and deeper, text-based insights. Moving forward, we embrace this hybrid of text and video, leveraging the strengths of each medium to deliver the "joy of knowing the Philippines now" to a wider audience.

We sincerely hope this inaugural issue becomes your **"New encounter with the Philippines"**

We look forward to your continued warm support as our activities expand toward 2026.

December 2025 The PHILIPPINE TOPICS Editorial Team

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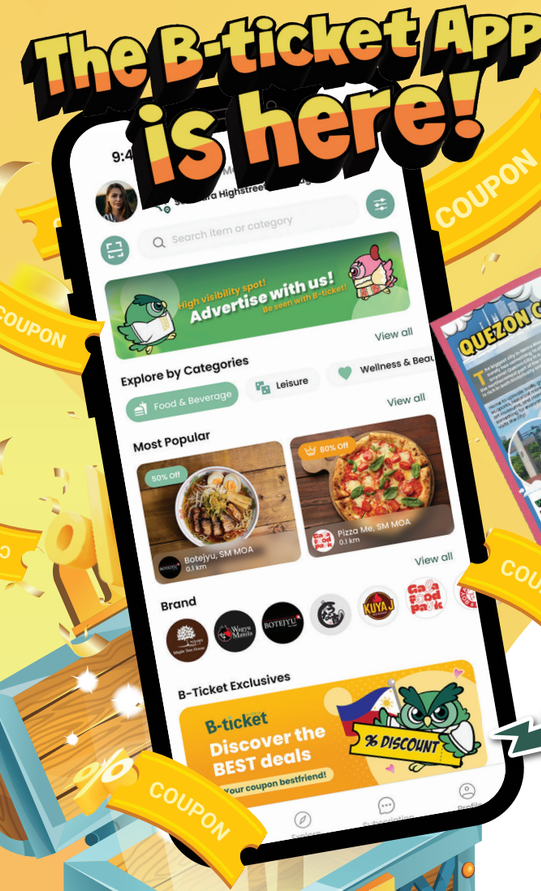

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